

GROUP IDENTITY IN CONTEXT OF PSYCHOLOGY OF SMALL GROUPS

The article covers the basics of the theory of group identity in the context of psychology of small groups. The content of the basic concepts of the theory, namely the educational environment, group identity, identity of the group, synergistic groups, group dynamics, group psyche and others are revealed. Mechanisms of relation among group identity, group dynamics and sociometric structure of group, mechanisms of development of various types of group identity are analyzed. The high level of identity in a small group causes the formation of a new quality, which is called “identity of group”. Intragroup dynamics in a small group may include the processes of integration and differentiation of group identity. The main concepts and conceptual models covered by the general theory, namely, role identity, cognitive and emotional components of identity, gender identity, trust and loyalty in the context of identity and others are described.

Key words: educational environment, group psyche, group identity, group dynamics, sociometric structure of group, role identity, gender identity, trust, loyalty.

Formulation of the problem. Studying group identity in the frames of small groups in psychology is a promising task for modern social psychology because it reveals studying opportunities of various group phenomena in their dialectical relationship. For several years this trend has been developing by the team of laboratory psychology of small groups and intergroup relations staff of the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine [1–2].

The role of this topic is defined by the need of studying the theoretical background of group processes in which a small group is not only as an object of psychological impact, but subject of the collective psyche. One of the main phenomena of the latter is group identity. Modern social life is impossible without effective functioning of various social structures from small group up to the society in whole. A small group is the basis (a kind of molecule) of social environment. Individual’s social life is in the small group. Its efficiency and operation define social structures effectiveness at different levels and social environment in general, as well as and complete self-identity as a small group member.

Socio-psychological climate problems in groups are complicated in conditions of market relations and social inequality is caused by the latter. They become challenging often have conflict or even destructive nature, which, in its turn, prevents individual’s harmonious development, makes its

effective functioning and self-realization complicated. Today the problem of improving in-group interaction among students is particularly acute, because at least one in four high school students is worried about relationship with peers according to representative surveys data made by the Institute of Social and Political Psychology.

Unfortunately, solving this important problem is significantly slowed in recent decades by the fact that there are ideas in the sociology, psychology and pedagogy of natural desire to overcome collectivist reduction has unfairly shifted the perspective of the individual groups and bands to the periphery of the scientific search. Creating the terms of reference of the group will necessarily include development of new concepts and theories because theoretical approaches created in the Soviet period met the requirements of ideology of the epoch (the so-called psychological theories of the staff), and consequently do not meet up-to-date social realities.

The purpose of the article is to analyze group identity specific features, its development patterns, functioning and development in the conceptual and phenomenological field of group consciousness and group unconscious as well as to develop means for optimization integration processes in small groups of various types (school classroom, student groups, pedagogic groups, therapeutic and training groups, etc.).

A number of concepts and patterns that became the background for socio-psychological theory of group identity in small groups were created as a result of theoretical and empirical research carried out [1]. The system of the mentioned theory basic concepts including even and odd concept, as well as the ones revealing group identity essence were underlined. "Learning environment" is one of the basic concepts of research, within the frames of which group identity. It consists of three substructures: material, informational and social-psychological. We will consider the third component of the educational environment in our research. *Group identity* should be regarded as a persistent identification of individuals with a particular group. It is defined by their direct contacts and relations, and / or some real common features (territorial, spatial, temporal, historical and value-oriented). The concept of "group identity" is correlated to some degree with more general notion of "social identity" as well as its specific manifestations (role, gender, professional identities and others).

One of the main statements of the theory is "group identity" and "identity of the group" notions' ratio. Relationship between group identity, group dynamics and sociometric group structure is proved [3]. Group identity develops during direct contact between group members. At a certain minimum level of identification with others, people can name their group "we", but the one of others "they". Group is an important value for humans. It is important for people to consider them not only an individual, but as

well as group member. Its identity level can be different. Groups of highly-developed identity acquire “synergic” properties. Rather strong identification processes can be observed; people can feel each other even without any direct communication. There is a high level of cohesion and unity. These and other features are united in our research in the concept of the “group mind”, which we regard as a set of *group consciousness* and *group unconsciousness*.

Improving efficiency of all the kinds of group activities is explained by high identity level in the group. A new notion named “group identity” is formed in this group. The group like the individual is a separate entity having its own identity, trying to preserve its originality, autonomy and integrity. Group needs to defend its identity. Family system, the therapeutic group (dyad), training group, creative research staff, professional staff (team), education team, sports team, military unit can be examples of groups where a very high development of group identity is possible under certain conditions. Groups of high-level group identity can have antisocial activity, for ex. a totalitarian sect, criminal group, and aggressive crowd. Group of football or music fanatics can be related to pro-social and anti-social, depending on the focus of their activity.

There can be different in-group dynamics. Groups interact with other group entities, share their values and create new common identity for them. Lower order identities can coincide. This process we call *group identity integration*. In some cases common identity is not created, thus group subjects do not create the only group. In case if there appear micro groups with their own identity (and they interact with each other) in the frames of one group, dynamics can be observed in *identity differentiation*.

Identities interactions and changes, in particular the ratio of identities at different levels (personal, micro group, group-wide) cause changes in the processes of sociometric group structure and group dynamics. And vice versa, artificial change of group structure configuration leads to group dynamics, and eventually a new structure of group identity is formed.

A group is stable, cohesive, or vice versa unstable, depending on the identity configuration. Group entities will cooperate or conflict at various levels, the group will work effectively or will disintegrate. In other words, if micro-groups’ identity prevails the all-group, the centrifugal processes can cause strong dynamic processes up to group destruction [3].

Theoretical analysis resulted as generalized theory of group identity, which established a system of hypotheses that were under empirical verification. As a result of empirical studies these ideas were proved experimentally, as well as their background – psychological mechanisms. More than 1,200 people and students of secondary schools, university students, teachers, psychologists, educational system teaching staff, married couples etc.

were an experimental research base. It was proved that the main features of group identity should be developed for group formation as a total social subject. It was reflected in the patterns of promoting group identity formation.

Identity formation as a holistic psychological formation having some regularity is reviewed in the pattern of cognitive and emotional components in the structure of identity. Identity is dynamic formation and is regarded as a sum of identities, which can be both cognitive and emotional. Emotional identification is more important for a small group rather than for medium and large groups. It is due to group identity to be defined by means of the identification of the individual with real people, with whom there are significant direct relationships and emotional ties. Identity is an element of group mental field pattern. Emotional and cognitive components make part of the group identity. They coexist in a dialectical unity and are functional components of the conceptual and phenomenological field of group consciousness and of the unconscious of the group. Group identity is one of intra-psychological phenomena of group mental field; group identity is an inter-psychical phenomenon. Group consciousness and the unconscious of the group include both cognitive and emotional components, but their ratio will vary in different groups [4].

Person's identity as an integral structure of individual's self-concept who is a member of both small and large groups is regarded in the role identity pattern. A human is not an abstract being, but the one always acting in unity of specific socio-psychological characteristics. Thus we should consider person's identity in its various manifestations rather than social, group, and individual ones. Group identity ties with other identities of the person are determined by the fact that initially there are contradictions in development between group and an individual, but they are overcome efficiently in the process of group development and of the individual as a group member. Therefore, group and individual identity are ontologically opposite structures in the human psyche, and creating role identity is one of the mechanisms of overcoming contradictions between person's group and individual identities.

The distance between ideas about the role of I-human and the ones of other group members was found out to create psychological dimension of the process of acquiring role identity by the person and reflects relationship between individual and group identities. This relative distance is specific for different micro groups of high school students: standouts and unsuccessful in school education, sociometric stars, and students of different creativity levels. The students who reveal high level of thought originality face internal role conflict because of stereotype expectations existing in the class as for a creative personal. Group and individual identity differ greatly in the

field of small group. It can be proved by relevant criteria. A fundamental conclusion can be made: although there exists expression polarity between group and individual identities, but human is oriented at group or individual reference roles at different levels of human activity in small groups can co-exist independently of each other without conflicts but supplement each other [5].

The pattern of group interaction in the gender context includes components as listed below: gender identity, gender norms and gender stereotypes. Determinants of this interaction in the group are: sense of belonging to the group, group cohesion, loyalty of the group members, trust in the group, group dynamics and role context of interaction between group members. The mechanisms are identification, reproduction, imitation, rejection, regulation, stereotyping, identification and individualization. The nature of the relationship, general purpose, interests, role positions of group members are factors of group interaction. Mini-groups (dyads, triads) based on gender preferences depending on the components of group identity (cognitive, emotional and behavioral) [6] are formed under the influence of this interaction.

Working methods were developed and approved in the frames of the sub-concept of small group leader's gender identity. Those methods were the background for understanding the gender role identity of small groups' members and formulated perspectives of leadership position to shape their own individual and group living space. The relation of men and women gender identity and their role positions in the student group and in family couples was found; gender identity of women is closer to androgyny to their leader position, and gender identity of men is closer to androgyny to more tolerant attitudes towards women leadership position in the given small group. Comfortable microclimate formation based on subject-subject relationships in the group was proved to occur owing to the use of coaching approach [7].

The pattern of trust considers complex socio-psychological phenomenon consisting of conative, cognitive and affective components is expressed in mutually expected and mutual relations of group members, in case of their vulnerability and dependence on each other in joint activity. Trust is one of the conceptual ontogenetic concepts that is always revealed in group relations and determines features of group identification processes. The ratio of "trust" and "confidence" is dynamic in the group. The change is caused by individual instruction (expectations) that appear during socialization as well as structural dynamic processes within the group, reflecting the unique culture of its life. The credibility of group members of high intensity group interaction (educational-therapeutic and therapeutic) has much lower level of expression, as opposed to such a trust of group member of the low-

intensity level (educational). High level of group interaction intensity effects influences on reducing individual and social trust. However, the same intensity during group identity formation contributes to their brand new (levels) growth by means of targeting to establish sensitive and close relationships. The latter are possible because of affective and behavioral willingness to trust, creating common semantic and ethical field [8].

The notion of “loyalty” and psychologically close ones by the content such as “commitment”, “adherence”, “loyalty”, “solidarity”, “enforcement/keeping to the rules” is correlated in the pattern of loyalty. The term of “loyalty” is understood and interpreted ambiguously at scientific, intercultural and domestic levels. The loyalty of a person to a small group is a system of attitudes, relationships of different valence and direction, including sociometric. The latter is associated with all the aspects of the life of a small group formation identity. The internal and external aspects can be defined in the manifestation of loyalty. The internal one is related to the real motivation of the group member, and the outer one is close to the obligation, solidarity with the position, group opinion and its cohesion. The latter is essential for the group development and is singled out in the two main life dimensions: instrumental, practical and related to the group purpose, and expressive, emotional one, representing the interpersonal context of group structure development. Development of loyalty level is the process that depends on the norms as interaction results that can be institutional, evolutionary, or contracting. As a result of the research a relation of loyalty to the process of group identity formation (which later begins to influence loyalty processes in the group), as well as displays of conformity, concessions, negativism, status of group member, its interest in the activity content and group tasks [9].

Conclusions. Analysis of the basic provisions of the theory of group identity in small groups enables its extension to the psychology of medium and large groups where the similar patterns of group identity and related to those dynamic processes (analogues of group-creating and group dynamics in small groups). This enables application of research results for analyzing contemporary social reality; in particular it refers to overcoming social contradictions caused by differences in group identity of large groups of people.

Results of socio-psychological study peculiarities of the research concerning group identity we use to rethink teaching experience synergetic formation of small groups. Special analysis showed the presence of many examples of achieving synergistic level of educational groups. Summarizing teaching experience from the perspective of the psychology of small groups can highlight the fundamental conditions of effective formation of group identity in the educational environment that encourages the adoption of small groups as synergistic.

So we can make a conclusion that effective group functioning, full-scale training, education and personal development are almost impossible without group identity formation in these communities. It is not only group processes regulator, but also a system-shaping factor of social environment at the level of small groups.

Prospects for future research of the laboratory staff are in the developing of the main provisions of the general theory of group psychological field. They will be implemented in three research areas: intra-psychological, inter-psychic and meta-psychic aspects of group mentality.

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