

Maldavsky et al., (2009c) Research on couples, families and groups. The operationalization of the concepts of denegative pact and narcissistic contract, SPR Meeting, Santiago de Chile, 2009.

### Research on couples, families and groups

#### The operationalization of the concepts of denegative pact and narcissistic contract

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French tradition on the clinical studies on couples, families and groups stressed the relevance of two concepts, that correspond to the unconscious alliance: denegative pact and narcissistic contract. These concepts, proposed by P. Aulagnier and by R. Kaës, are useful to understand intersubjective functional and pathological processes.

#### Narcissistic contract

Two or more persons construct the links thanks to a reciprocal compromise in the tentative of the maintenance of the group and the existence of the intervening subjects. This compromise implies (a) the libidinal investment of certain common goals and constitutive beliefs and (b) the reciprocal libidinal investment among the members of the group. These links contribute to the development of the feeling of filiation and affiliation.

Its complement is the

#### Denegative pact

Two or more persons intend expelling certain conflictive content (that can be dangerous for the maintenance of the group) from their link and reciprocal exchanges.

The systematic research of these functional and pathological processes requires the operationalization of the concepts. We suggest that the combination of these complementary concepts coincides with the concept of defense.

### Operationalization of the concepts

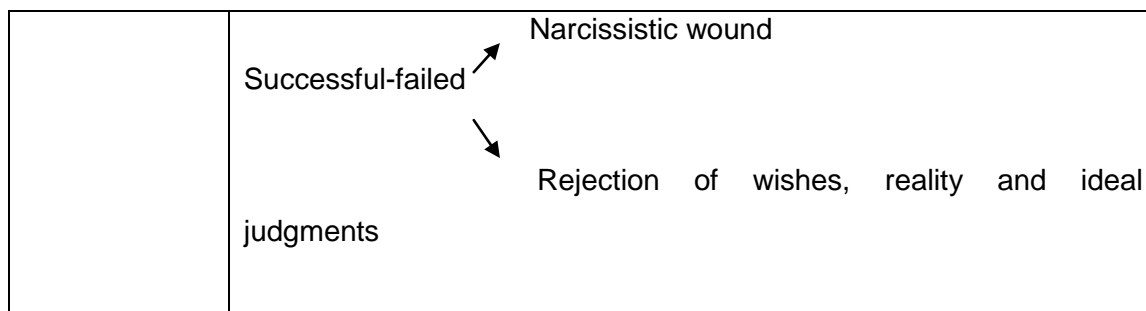
From the psychoanalytic perspective of the research on couple exchanges and life, drives (and the corresponding wish) and defenses, as well as their state, are the main concepts.

Between them, the main one is drive, but it is always combined with the defense, that Freud (1915c) defined as a drive vicissitude in the ego.

	Function
	to maintain or increase positive feelings as a consequence of giving relevance to some supposed positive Ego aspects
Defense	to reject from the Ego certain psychic component : a wish a judgement a reality an affect.

At the same time, the defense can be normal or pathogenic, and could be presented in three different states: successful, failed, successful-failed.

	States
Functional and Pathogenic	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 20px;">Successful</div> <div style="margin-right: 20px;">↗</div> <div>Maintenance of narcissistic equilibrium</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 20px;">judgments</div> <div style="margin-right: 20px;">↘</div> <div>Rejection of wishes, reality and ideal</div> </div>
Defense	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 20px;">Failed</div> <div style="margin-right: 20px;">↗</div> <div>Narcissistic wound</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 20px;"></div> <div style="margin-right: 20px;">↘</div> <div>Return of the rejected thing</div> </div>



Connections between unconscious alliances and defenses

The concept of narcissistic contract can be connected with the concept of functional defenses in the exchanges in a couple, a family, etc. In particular, this concept can be connected with the maintenance of a functional and changing narcissistic balance thanks to the investment of certain ideals, beliefs, etc., that are substitutive sublimatory formations of incestual and parricide tendencies, etc. The concept of denegative pact can be connected with the concept of functional and pathogenic defenses in the exchanges in a couple, a family, etc. In particular this concept implies the functional or pathogenic rejection of certain conflictive sectors of wishes, reality, etc. The narcissistic contract is the complement of a functional denegative pact.

On the method of research

We suggest that the David Liberman algorithm (DLA), which is a useful method for the detection of drives and defenses, as well as their state, allows carrying out researches in the clinical field of couples, families and groups. The method permits to detect either the past and present extra-transference relationship in each member of the couple (and also between both of them), and the intra-session processus, including verbal, paraverbal and movement levels of analysis.

Table I: Drives and main defenses

Repression	Disavowal / Foreclosure of reality and the ideal	Foreclosure of the affect
GPH UPH	A1 O1	IL

A2	O2	
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Table II: Drives and secondary defenses

IL	O1	O2	A1	A2	UPH	GPH
-drive regression	-drive regression	-drive regression	-drive regression	-drive regression	-drive regression	-ego regression
-ego regression	-ego regression	-ego regression	-ego regression	-anulation	-	-superego repression
-generalized avoidance	-intrachannel splitting	-ego splitting	-ego splitting	-isolation	displacement	-identification
-organic introjection	-projection	-introjection	-introjection	-reactive formation	-projection	-
-incorporation	-introjection	identification	identification	-control	-specific avoidance	condensation
-expulsion	-trasformation into the contrary	-projection	-projection	suppression of the affect		
-organic projection	-turning against oneself	transformation into the contrary	transformation into the contrary			
-adhesive identification	-mimetism	-turning against oneself	-turning against oneself			
-splitting of the primitive real ego						

On the intersubjective distribution of drives and pathological defenses: proposal of a model of analysis

### Example 1

Freud (1905d) stated (1) that for certain patients, the neuroses (in which repression prevails) is the negative of the perversion (in which disavowal prevails) and that this intra-psychic situation is usually transferred to the intersubjective links of a couple.

In that case, the man can be perverse and the woman neurotic (although, of course, this distribution can be inverse). In those situations there is not just a distribution of the defenses in the intersubjective context (the repression in the neurotic woman, the disavowal in the perverse man) but also the same occurs with the drives.

Table III: Couple 1

Couple neurotic/perverse	Prevalent Defense	Prevalent Drives	Complementary Defense	Complementary Drives
Woman /man	Repression	GPH, UPH or A2	Disavowal	O1, O2 or A1
Man/woman	Disavowal	O1, O2 or A1	Repression	GPH, UPH or A2

It is possible, as well, to conjecture that between both members of this kind of couple there are reciprocal identifications: the neurotic woman sees in her husband a representative of her own perverse fragment and the perverse husband finds in her wife his own neurotic fragment.

### Example 2

A woman who sacrifices herself for love and gives her goods to a man that starts appearing as a good-for-nothing and finishes revealing as an ungrateful and traitor. In the woman a lovely wish prevails (corresponding to the secondary oral sadistic drive) and in the man, again, the eager of vengeance (corresponding to

the primary anal sadistic drive). But both members of the couple share the same dominant defense, the disavowal, that leads the woman to the sacrifice and the men to the vindictive treason.

Table IV: Couple 2

Couple Perverse/perverse	Prevalent Defense	Prevalent Drives
woman	Disavowal	O2
man	Disavowal	O1

Example 3

A woman with exhibitionist wishes (corresponding to the genital phallic drive) and a man with a perfectionist and hyper-moral tendency (corresponding to the secondary anal sadistic drives). In the women, as in the first example, the repression prevails but something similar occurs in the man. That is to say, both coincide on defenses, but differ on drives.

Table V: Couple 3

Couple Neurotic/neurotic	Prevalent Defense	Prevalent Drives
woman	Repression	GPH
man	Repression	A2

Example 4

The man and the woman have the same abstract cognitive wish (corresponding to the primary oral drive), but while the woman combines it with her laboral practice (for example, researcher in the logical-mathematic), the man develops a mystic delirium of receiving a revelation from some deity. In that case, husband and wife have the same type of wish but different defense: sublimation in the woman and foreclosure of reality and the ideal in the man.

Table VI: Couple 4

Couple	Prevalent Defense	Prevalent Drives
Sublimation/psychosis		
woman	Sublimation	O1
man	Foreclosure of reality and ideal instance	O1

Example 5

The man lasts in a permanent state of panic, while the woman has fury outbreaks. In that case, both have the same type of wish (to maintain a precarious intracorporal energetic equilibrium), that corresponds to an intrasomatic drive, and also the same defense, foreclosure of the affect, but they differ on the state of that defense: while in the man the defense fails in the woman it succeeds.

Table VII: Couple 5

Couple	Prevalent Defense	State of the defense	Prevalent Drives
Panic/Fury			
woman	Foreclosure of the affect	succeeds	IL
man	Foreclosure of the affect	fail	IL

In all the examples it is possible to study two concepts, wish and pathological defense, to what we have added the state of the defense. In the first example, that it is mentioned by Freud, wishes and defenses differ in both members of the couple. In the examples 2 and 3, the differences are on wishes but not on the defense, in the example 4, the differences are on defenses but not on the wish, in

the example 5, both members share the same wish (intrasomatic libido) and defense (foreclosure of the affect) but differ on the state of this defense (successful in one of them and failed on the other one).

#### On the systematic research of the intersubjectivity in the clinical situation

The previous examples allow to infer that in the narcissistic contract and the denegative pact both members of the couple can combine different wishes and defenses as well as their state. In the pathogenic combination of wishes and defenses of the members of the couple (like the narcissistic pact or the pathogenic denegative pact) they can last trapped in a stereotyped link, in which each one reinforces the unchangeable rigidity of the other. Four alternatives are conceivable: 1) both members of the couple match on the prevalent drive and pathogenic defense, 2) the members of the couple differ on both of them, 3) both members match on the defense but not on the drive, and viceversa, 4) they match on the drive but not on the defense. We should add that in some occasions where there are similarities in the drives and prevalent defenses, the differences are in the level of the state of the pathological defense, that is successful in one of the members of the couple, and failed in the other one.

The operationalization of the functional and pathogenic denegative pact, the narcissistic pact and the narcissistic contract also allows to research the changes in the link between the members of the couple.