

Wells, L (1995.). "Scapegoating in groups (pp 71-73)". The group as a whole; a systemic socioanalytic perspective to interpersonal and group relations. Chapter 3 in *Groups in Context: a new perspective on group dynamics* text edited by Gillette, J. and McCollom, M.

Scapegoating is a special and destructive form of role differentiation, particularly in the context of work groups. The origin of scapegoating has its roots in myths and rituals of mankind. It emerges from the religious ritual of sacrifice of and totemistic practices (Jaffe, 1968; Lieberman et al., 1973). The ritual of scapegoating is found in the Book of Leviticus 16:1-34. Scapegoating was practiced by the early Hebrew tribes to atone for their transgressions against their God. Leviticus 16, versus 7-10 states:

⁷ Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁸ He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat. ⁹ Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. ¹⁰ But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat.

The scapegoat represented the sins of the tribes that must be separated from themselves and sent into the wilderness. The tribe could project and exorcise their sins through the scapegoat. This act of exorcising the sin (bad parts) of the head of the scapegoat is a mechanism used to cope with their ambivalent relationship to their deity and group. Jaffe (1968) states:

"In the process of atonement and purification, the ritual involves among other things, the disposition of two goats. One is killed and the blood sprinkled upon the ark-cover and then upon the alter ... it is burnt to make smoke. The ritual proceeds to dispose of the second goat, which is the "scapegoat." The entire removal of the sin and guilt of the community is symbolized by placing these upon the head of the goat who is then sent away, bearing all of the inequities, into the wilderness or "land which is cut off" [to prevent the animals return]. When later it is no longer possible to send the goat to a place whence it could not return to inhabited parts, the practice became one of the casting the animal down a precipice"

Groups often search for the scapegoat to represent and repent for their badness (that is, anxiety, weakness, sins, et cetera). The scapegoat role provides the group with an imperfect solution to its felt badness: for example, incompetence, anxiety, racism, or conflict. By protective identification group members deposit their unwanted parts (their guilt, rage, contempt) in another, then proceed to drive the other into the wilderness or into death.

As the Hebrew children used the scapegoat to atone for their sins and to eliminate their guilt, the group uses the scapegoat to cope with its anxiety and badness. Groups create scapegoats to hide every person's self-contempt, self-doubt, weakness, and destructiveness. Miller (1974) states: "scapegoating is a stereotyped example in groups where shared patterns of denial are focused by the process of projective identification on one member. That member is asked and often agrees to express all of the given undesirable attitudes for the group (p. 12)."

The search for the scapegoat or scapegoats typically begins after the group experiences aggression or frustration. Unconsciously the group members' thought may be: "someone is responsible for my anxiety." This begins the group's search-and-destroy mission.

Typically, people with different demographic characteristics, expressive personalities, and valency for patient or martyr roles become excellent candidates for scapegoating. Groups may even locate a dyad or triad to deposit their denied feelings and then behave in ways to isolate or render them crazy.

Using a scapegoat is an easy (albeit infantile) psychological solution for anxiety and unwanted parts. Excessive projective identification allows group members to deposit all unwanted parts in the scapegoat at the expense of the scapegoat. The scapegoat allows other group members to maintain their self-righteous altruistic imagoes. This is why the scapegoat must be separated and sent away; the group cannot stand to look at or face itself seen in the scapegoat. Hence, group members deny any responsibility for making a scapegoat or having any characteristics of the scapegoat.

This cycle of search, isolate, destroy, and denial crates group casualties; to fill a person up with the groups anxiety (psychotic feelings); isolated these feelings in the person as if he or she is the only one who is feeling crazy; exorcise the person from the group; and then deny any responsibility for making a person a scapegoat is a subtle and dangerous operation. Scapegoating has taken its toll of human life, destroying work groups, organizations, and families (Lieberman et al., 1973)

Excessive projective identification and rigid role differentiation lead to scapegoating. Role reversal, maintenance discussion, and/or interventions in the group's projective identification motif can alter the scapegoating phenomenon.

Comprehending the complexity of the scapegoating phenomenon is essential to the systemic socio-analytic approach. Increasing the awareness of group members may abate the group's tendency to scapegoat. There are indeed other ways groups can cope with their anxiety and frustration.