Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

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Lectures 10-11: Randall Collins:
Stratification, Emotional Energy and the Transient Emotions

According to Collins, emotion potentially occupies a crucial question in sociological theory. For example, Collins argues that many classical sociologists implied an emotional basis to social order. Durkheim raised the question of what holds society together, and in suggesting that various mechanisms produce social solidarity, suggested to Collins that they do so by producing emotions. Parsons argued that society is held together by values, but these themselves may be seen as cognitions fused with emotion. Weber's consideration of legitimacy, status groups and religious world views were permeated by particular kinds of emotions. Even Marx's analysis of class conflict and alienation carried a implicit emotional elements.

The emotional implications of such classical writers need to be drawn out, and this is also why the sociology of emotions should be brought into the central questions of sociology: (1) what holds a society together? (2) what mobilizes conflict? (3) what serves to uphold stratification? While there is undoubtably a cognitive element to each, attending to the emotional aspects may be vital to a comprehensive understanding.

Unfortunately, the classical theorists merely imply emotion in their analyses, but usually do not refer to it explicitly due to the macro focus of their work. Because they deal with society at a level of considerable abstraction, they fail to deal with people's experiences in everyday life. However, if we keep their concepts in mind, and reverse the focus, we can see that- aggregated across time and space- micro-level emotional processes may be at play.

When we compare this approach to many contemporary microsociological approaches, we can see how they are sadly lacking. S.I. emphasizes process, emergence and cognition, phenomenology emphasizes routine and cognition, and exchange theory behaviors and payoffs. Emotion is central to none of these.

Yet, there are two crucial exceptions. The first is Goffman's interaction ritual theory. While only speaking of emotion in passing, he does apply Durkheimian theory to micro situations, attempting to explain how ritual solidarity is generated in fleeting encounters in everyday social life. This broadened Durkheim's analysis beyond religious and patriotic rituals to include just about any type of interaction where structure was being enacted or maintained. Yet he also was aware that these many pockets of moral solidarity could be produced unevenly, which Collins sees as a possible link to stratification.

The second exception is Garfinkel's ethnomethodology. While a cognitive theory on the surface, it is centrally concerned to show that people have limited cognitive capacities, and

consistently use a variety of practices to construct mundane reality to avoid the emotional implications of their arbitrariness. When his "breaching experiments" forced subjects to question reality and social order, their reactions were often intensely emotional. Collins suggests that this reveals how one's everyday social world is a sacred object, and how violating that can lead to righteous indignation.

In both of these cases there is a link to the issue of social solidarity at the micro-level, and emotion is not far from the surface.

Disruptive and Long-Term Emotions: or "Dramatic" Emotions and Emotional Energy:

The above approaches force us to widen our conception of emotion. While ordinary language suggests that emotions are sudden and dramatic (e.g. fear, anger, joy), both Goffman and Garfinkel lead us to realize that there also long-lasting, undramatic tones or moods that permeate group life. For Garfinkel, this may be the accomplished feeling that "nothing out of the ordinary is happening". For Goffman (and Durkheim), these include feelings of solidarity, membership, and feelings about self. If all go well, these are smoothly persistent emotions that may be best recognized by their absence - or contrasts such as enthusiasm, alienation or embarrassment). These are the backdrop, or baseline, against which the more dramatic emotions shine.

Interaction Ritual and Emotional Energy:

Collins' basic model of ritual interaction has the following elements:

1. A group of at least two assembled face to face;
2. Focus of attention upon the same object or activity, and mutual awareness of each other's attention.
3. Members share a common mood (i.e. get caught up in each others' emotions through common focus and emotional contagion, driving out competing feelings).
4. The production of feelings of solidarity as a result of this emotional coordination. This involves a distinction between the transient, short-term emotion produced in the encounter and the longer-term feelings of attachment to the group.

Collins refers to these long-term outcomes as "emotional energy," a term that operates like a continuum ranging from confidence, enthusiasm and positive self-feelings, at one end, to depression, lack of initiative and negative self-feelings at the other. Yet this term is not purely psychological as its point of reference is the social group that either "pumps one up" or "depresses" the individual. It also includes a moral element: feelings of what is right and wrong, moral and immoral. Those who are full of emotional energy feel like good persons, righteous about what they're doing; those who have low emotional energy feel the opposite.

5. Rituals shape cognitions. The shared focus of attention in ritual become loaded with emotional overtones, becoming symbolic of group membership. This is how society gets inside the

individual's mind, giving individuals a store of cognitions that they carry around with them, use to think and communicate with. As such, we are able to feel the emotions of social solidarity in the various ideas with which we think (i.e. we may be pumped up or depressed by ritual encounters, even when alone).

Stratified Interaction Rituals: Power Rituals and Status Rituals:

Interaction rituals are variable, and may be successful or unsuccessful. This depends on matters such as (a) ecological factors, allowing or forcing groups together in various sizes and with varying frequency; (b) motivational factors affecting how attractive particular kinds of interactions are for specific individuals; and (c) material resources necessary for staging rituals. Variations in these conditions lead to the stratification of interaction.

Power Rituals:

Collins refers to power as all factors that bring people together who are unequal in their resources such that some give orders and others take orders. This is an interaction ritual insofar as it involves focusing attention on the same activity and becoming aware of each other's involvement: it has a shared emotional focus which builds up as the ritual proceeds. Order givers take the initiative and, if successful, uphold the organizational chain of command, gain emotional energy from their domination, and make themselves loyal to the official symbols of the organization.

Order takers, on the other hand, may be required to take part - whether by raw coercion, economic dependence, or ephemeral chances at advancement wielded by superiors. Taking orders is in itself alienating, but persons subject to authority cannot usually avoid it directly (but typically do so "backstage"). They are required to be present at order-giving rituals and to give at least ritualistic assent at that time. They know their boss' position, and who has the initiative in that context. Thus, power rituals are asymmetrical interaction rituals which focus on the order-giving process. The emotions that are invoked are restrained: there is a tone of respect, of going along with what the order giver is demanding. The more coercive and extreme the power differential, the more emotional contagion there is.

Thus, a successful order giving ritual coerces a strong mutual focus of attention and produces strongly shared - though heavily mixed -emotion. The order giver feels both mastery and the order taker's feelings of weakness. The order-taker has feelings of weakness, depression, fear, and the strong emotional energy of the other's dominance. This may in some respects explain the Stockholm syndrome, where the coerced in some respects identify with the perpetrator. It may also impact on S&M, and the cycle of violence more generally. Power rituals thus produce complex emotions, where each party shares the dominance/anger/fear/passivity complex in different proportions. Each also share an orientation toward dominant symbols, but with a different blend of emotions (i.e. order givers, often politically conservative, identify these as ideals to preserve; order takers are more alienated from them, privately speak of them cynically when they can get away with it, and attack these "negative sacred objects" if given a

chance to rebel).

Of course, these are presented as polar, ideal types. However, power rituals in the real world exist on more of a continuum (e.g. there may be an intermediate position, such as in bureaucracies, known as an "order transmitter"). Similarly, there are also egalitarian exchanges where power is neutral. However, this brings us to consider a second dimension.

Status Rituals:

Collins uses the word status with reference to centrality or peripherality in status groups. Instead of using it to refer to hierarchical differences of all kinds, he is speaking more in terms of a continuum of membership/nonmembership; popularity vs. unpopularity. Thus, each ritual interaction not only produces power effects, as above, but also status membership effects that operate even when the power dimension is negated by equality.

When considering how people can differ in status participation, Collins sees several subdimensions. First, how much does the person participate? Are they always there, or isolated on the fringes? The one who participates often, who is at the center of the action, is likely to experience greater emotional energy, moral solidarity, and attachment to group symbols; the isolated individual just the opposite. Secondly, there is the question of what kinds of groups one participates in (i.e. always the same one, or a loose network of many different groups and situations). The former will produce strong emotional attachment to symbols, literal mindedness in-group/out-group boundaries, and a response of anger and fear when symbols are violated or interactions go badly; the latter a more cosmopolitan outlook, relativism, weak emotional tone, and feelings of anxiety and embarrassment when others violate the appropriately casual and sociable tone expected in interactions.

Effects on Long-Term Emotions: Emotional Energy:

The interaction ritual (IR) chain model proposes that individuals acquire or lose emotional energy in both power and status interactions. Order givers gain emotional energy, order takers lose it; successful enactment of group membership raises emotional energy, experiencing marginality or exclusion lowers it. These dimensions may combine in different ways to affect emotional energy. But, it is most important to remember that interaction rituals are connected in chains over time, with the emotional/symbolic results of the last interaction becoming inputs for the next. Hence, emotional energy (EE) tends to accumulate positively or negatively over time.

EE is, however, a very general metaphor that needs specification. It may well reflect a general feeling of being "up" or "down," but may also be specific to particular situations. In this sense, it is a readiness for action which manifests itself in taking the initiative in particular sorts of social relationships or with particular persons (e.g. in power relationships=expecting to dominate or be dominated; in status relationships to be central, marginal, or not a member at all). Moreover, these energies vary by networks and groups (e.g. work vs. home).

Thus, people move through the chain of encounters they face in their daily lives with an up and down flow of EE, and the success or failure of various IR motivate them to repeat certain types of encounters and to avoid others.

EE manifests itself both physically and psychologically, but its underlying basis is cognitive: an expectation of being able to dominate particular kinds of situations or to enact membership in particular groups. This involves certain symbols "sparking off propensities" (positive or negative) possibly, but not necessarily, "on a subconscious level." Thus, "there is a very fine-grained, micro-anticipation that happens within the interaction itself (on a level down to fractions of a second), as well as a more long-term expectation of being able to enter into such micro-coordination with particular kinds of people." EE is a complex of these kinds of expectations.

The low end of EE is depression, manifested in withdrawal both from expressiveness and activity - often the result of both low power and a strong sense of powerlessness to do anything about it. Negative experience on the status dimension brings a degree of depression (although shame may be mixed in).

The main long-term EE's resulting from stratified interactions, then, are:

(a) High levels of enthusiasm, confidence and initiative, resulting from either power or status dimensions;
(b) Low levels of the same (i.e. depression, shame) resulting from either power or status;
(c) anger, which results from moderate levels of negative experiences, particularly on the power dimension (i.e. when there are sufficient possibilities of fighting back.).

In all of these long-term determinants of EE, trust or distrust of others and ones abilities may play a role as well.

Short-Term or Dramatic Emotions:

Most research on emotion has focused on the short-term, dramatic emotions that disrupt the ongoing flow of activity. Collins argues, however, that these are derived from the baseline of emotional energy, that it is against the backdrop of an ongoing flow of EE that particular disruptive emotions are shaped (e.g. surprise).

The positive emotions (e.g. enthusiasm, joy, humor) become intense largely because of a contagious buildup during a successful interaction ritual (e.g. sports fans at a wining game, participants at a party, love and sexual passion). Such positive emotional outbursts are relatively short in duration, but happen against a baseline of previous emotional energy. Some symbols are necessarily charged up with emotional energy in the first place and used as ingredients for carrying out a successful ritual in a particular situation (e.g. charismatic leaders exhibit positive emotions and charge up a crowd).

The reverse is true of negative emotional energy, exhibited in personality traits, than can bring the group down. Indeed, the negative short term emotions are even more clearly related to the baseline of emotional energy. Anger, for example, is frequently conceptualized as the capacity to mobilize energy to overcome a barrier to one's ongoing efforts (e.g. power dominance, where one has an opportunity to resist). Yet, truly powerful people may not be so likely to encounter resistance, and, in that sense, may be a sign of weakness. Yet, so long as they retain power, they can more easily afford to get angry as a confident sign that they expect others to do what they say. Much depends on that person's previous store of EE. The most violent form of anger tends to result after strenuously overcoming a particularly strong frustration or provocation - something that truly frightens an individual. A prior build-up of fear, which is eventually mastered by winning a conflict, thus tends to result in an outburst of anger just at the moment of feeling sure of victory (e.g. wartime atrocities). Conversely, people who are weak do not exhibit anger in this way, because they do not have the emotional resources to mount resistance. Thus, they turn their anger inward as depression.

In between these two extremes there are selective outbursts of anger, targeted at structural rivals in the market of social relationships (e.g. two people courting the same partner; two business people courting the same client). Here one does not feel anger against someone stronger nor weaker, but someone of rough parity whom is frustrating one's projects.

Another variant would be righteous anger by an existing group against those who violate its sacred symbols (e.g. witch-hunts, child-molesters, heretics or scapegoats). Such anger tends to be proportionate to the amount of emotional charge of membership feelings around particular symbols, particularly evident in groups at a local level with high social density, as opposed to those with a diffuse, cosmopolitan focus. This is related to both the power and status dimensions represented by the symbols violated. Such righteous anger is particularly intense because it is expressed with a strong sense of security, political and community support: evoked as a common feeling of membership in an enforcement coalition (e.g. the historical practice of public executions was very popular). The separation of church and state has mitigated political-community links in righteous anger to some extent, but "moral entrepreneurs" on the fringe often mobilize righteous anger in attempt to re-fuse community and polity (e.g. victims' advocates urging tougher laws on behalf of the community).

Fear is another short-term negative emotion, often disruptive to activities. For adults, at least, the most important fear becomes that of social consequences such as coercion or being socially excluded, along with the corresponding impact on one's EE. In social relationships, fear is basically a response to another's anger, or an anticipation of being hurt thereby. It is thus most directly related to long-term EE deriving from subordination on the power dimension. However, it may also result from the bludgeoning effects (and anticipations) of negative, exclusionary social situations (e.g. one can expect, or experience, status loss through "loss of face" or embarrassment).

Transformations from Short-Term Emotions into Long-Term Emotional Energy:

The results of various short-term emotional experiences tend to feed back into the long-term emotional makeup: emotional energy. EE, however, doesn't have to depend on the dramatic emotions, since situations of uncontested domination or belonging, or their opposite, also add or deplete one's store of confidence or attraction towards particular kinds of situations.

With the negative emotions, there is a clinical tradition that emphasizes traumatic situations as the major determinant of long-term social and psychological functioning. While undoubtably true to a degree, these should be measured against the background of the person's overall level of EE (e.g. a person with an initially high level of EE will likely fare better after an episode of extreme anger, fear or shame than one who hasn't such built-up emotional resources).

Questions for Further Research:

Collins concludes this discussion of his approach by suggesting a variety of issues to be tested in further research:

Testing the Interaction Ritual Model:

Collins asserts that the most important test is to show that there is a relationship between the amount of focus of mutual attention, the amount of coordination of activity (esp. "Micro-coordination at an unconscious level) and the buildup of a common emotion. It is also important to test the aftereffects of a successful IR (i.e. whether participants come away with enhanced EE and a favorable emotional attachment to the symbols generated).

The emotional effects of power and status rituals are specific applications in this regard. To do so, we have to find better ways of measuring these variables than we have now, and examine explicitly the power and status dimensions of people's work and other social experience as it actually happens (e.g. Collins favors a concept of "network position" for power/status dimensions).

Testing Power and Status Effects on Emotions:

Collins argues for a multivariate design measuring independently the amount of order-giving and order taking that happens in one's daily life, the amount of time in the presence of other people versus alone, and the amount of diversity of communications/focus of attention. This could be done through interviews, although a better measure would be observational, diarizing by participants, or involve periodic sampling.

In considering the cognitions, behaviors and emotions of individuals as dependent variables, Collins argues that it would be necessary to explicitly measure both the short-term and long-term emotions evoked by these ritual situations.

Measuring Emotional Energy:

Collins focuses on the methodologies available for studying the short-term, dramatic emotions (e.g. hormone levels, "affectual loadings" of various social categories on power, status, and activation). He argues that to measure shifts of EE in real life situations, it would be desirable to follow people's experiences across a chain of interactions (e.g. longitudinally). Some may be possible in a lab setting, but naturalistic observation would also be desirable.

For independent variables Collins suggests measuring experiences of order giving, order taking, egalitarian interaction, the social density of interaction (focus/contagion), and the variety of interaction patterns (local/cosmopolitan). For dependent variables, it would be best to use unobtrusive measures such as:

1. *Voice:* confidence vs. apathy, loudness, speed, fluidity, false starts, ease or difficulty getting the floor;
2. *Eyes*: eye contact, dominating or avoiding mutual gaze;
3. *Facial Expression*: Zones of the face that signal emotion vs. most easily masked.

Bodily Postures and Movements:

It has been argued that bodily movements are forms of emotional expression, and that the body can only be controlled so far in this respect. Collins argues that we need, as in the above measures, to consider these as manifested both with regard to the short-term, dramatic emotions as well as the longer term background levels of EE.

Collins argues that a combination of all of these measures could be studied simultaneously, and this would help narrow which of these measures were most highly correlated with long-term EE, and which with the short-term emotions. After this was sorted out, it would be possible to concentrate on the most efficient measures of EE.

Other Hypotheses:

In addition to tests of the general model presented here, there are other topics that require investigation. A few of these include righteous anger precipitated by symbol violation in high vs. low density communities, the relative carryover of short-term dramatic (and undramatic) emotions into long term EE, and the extent to which long-term EE provides a baseline for short-term emotions.

Conclusion:

Collins argues that once good measures for EE and its various subdimensions are available, it will be possible to carry out unobtrusive emotion surveys. Sociologists could sample a population of people across situations to provide a temporal-spatial map of the emotional ecology of society. By aggregating this sampling of emotional patterns observed at the micro-level, it would be possible to see what this tells about the macro-structure of society (e.g.

economic life, politics, cultural movements, etc). This would put us in the position of being able to not only test theories of how emotional energies operate to reproduce social structure, but to energize the dynamics of conflict and change as well.