<u>Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions</u>

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Lectures 12-13:Steven Gordon: Social Structural Effects on Emotions

The study of social structure and personality, rooted in Marx, Weber and Durkheim, has recently become dormant - largely because of its recent reliance on Freudian and functionalist theories and empirical questions about the validity of personality constructs. Research on emotion may revitalize this topic. Indeed, it may revitalize the field of social psychology generally, which appears split into psychological, sociological and social structure/personality variants. With few exceptions, systematic consideration of large scale social structural influence on emotion has lagged. Were the sociology of emotions to include this aspect of social psychology, perhaps it could help reintegrate this fragmented field.

Theoretical Questions about Social Structure and Emotion:

1. *The Effects of Social Structure and Culture:* Any large scale social phenomenon has both structural and cultural effects on the person. The former include persisting patterns of social relationships that establish situational contingencies and constraints, motivate behavior and instigate emotion. "Emotional culture," on the other hand, includes emotion vocabularies, norms and beliefs about emotion (e.g. both illustrated by the joint emergence of family privacy and emotional intimacy among Tuscan nobility on the eve of the Renaissance: instigated by structural factors such as household segregation and separation while away on business. This produced emotions, filtered through the culture's differential private, public and gendered rules for expression). More research is needed to see to what degree structural and cultural effects coincide or differ.

2. *Intermediary Social Structures:* The old social structure and personality paradigm failed to explain correlations between specific aspects of the two levels. Thus, effects of large scale social structure on emotion - and vice versa - should be seen as mediated through smaller groups or institutions in which the individual participates directly (e.g. marriages, social networks). For example, in Roman social structure, fathers held unlimited power over their sons, including the power to disinherit or even condemn to death. As such, many sons hated and feared their fathers. This shows how structural effects on emotion are mediated through intermediary social structures.

3. *Specification of Factors:* The sociology of emotion should specify these proposed linkages between macro and micro constructs, and test alternative links (e.g. as Hochschild has tried to do by linking service work, emotional experience and expression; or as Simmel did with the emotional overstimulation in urban life relative to the individual's limited potential for emotional output).

4. *Stability of Components:* Which emotional components are relatively dynamic, open to influence from social structure, and which are more intractable? It is clear that some emotions have a stable core (e.g. physiological sensations associated with fear and anger), while social construction is more evident in emotion vocabularies, rules governing expression and feeling, situational definitions of meanings, and purposeful behavior. Which components of any emotion are so central that a change in them produces a change in the entire emotional system? Gordon feels that this is the person's definition of the situation (e.g. being scared when grabbed from behind, but then realizing it was a friend playing a joke).

5. *Content vs. Abstract Analytical Variables:* So far, sociological research has largely focused on content variables (specific emotions or emotional relationships), on the one hand, or on particular institutions or historical periods. Little has been done to develop a comprehensive theory of the social processes common across all emotions. Greater advances might be made by focusing on content-independent, abstract variables that apply across particular emotions and social structures (e.g. differentiation of emotion vocabularies). Yet the risk is that across different societies the relationship between emotional components may also vary.

6. *Relativity of Emotion Psychology:* Since emotion vocabularies, norms, and expressive behaviors vary across cultures, theories of emotion developed in one society may not apply to explain emotions in others - as anthropologists have pointed out.

7. *Dynamics of Social Change in Emotions:* Most research to date has been ethnographic or correlational, not longitudinal or historical. Thus, the dynamics of social change in emotion have been left largely unexplored. Yet, any major change in social organization has implications for members' emotional experience and expression. These include: (1) the relationships and groups in which emotions are experienced; (2) courses of behavior by which emotion is expressed; (3) the vocabulary by which emotions are identified; (4) the norms prescribing appropriate feeling and expression; and (5) the personal temperaments and styles of emotion that a society favors.

8. *Individual Effects on Social Structure:* How do emotional experiences and behavior of individuals feed back to influence social structure? If seen as intervening, rather than dependent variables, they could be seen as mediating between one stage of social structure and the following stage in time. Widespread patterns of individual emotion could either maintain or alter the wider social structure.

Defining a Sociological Approach to Emotions:

A sociological perspective reveals how seemingly individual emotional experiences and actions are influenced by social forces rather than psychological variables. In this vein, the socially emergent dimensions of emotion include:

1. *Origin:* Most emotions originate in cultural definitions of human relationships, not in biology;

2. *Time:* Emotion is not only determined by present conditions, but by cumulative properties of a

social relationship based on past interactions and anticipations of future contacts.

3. *Structure:* The coherence of an emotions's components is maintained by psychological and social forces. A particular emotion's meaning evokes specific feelings displayed through certain expressive gestures and instrumental actions, to which other people respond positively or negatively. Yet the particular components may vary as structural and cultural factors change - and this may be independent, to a degree, of what the individual is privately experiencing.

4. *Change:* Micro-level change in emotion can be socially caused, not merely psychological (e.g. self-regulation of emotions in response to norms). Macro level change can result from historical trends in cultural advice about how to reduce, intensify or substitute emotions.

According to Gordon, social structural effects on emotion flow through at least three interactional processes. In emotion *differentiation*, societies and subgroups distinguish in their language and social behavior among many types of an emotion (e.g. forms of anger). Through *socialization*, individuals learn to feel, attend to, express and recognize the particular emotions identified in their society. Finally, the *management* of sentiments is the regulation of both expression and feeling according to norms of appropriateness. These three social processes link the larger social structure with the emotional experience and behavior of individuals.

Differentiation of Emotions:

Emotions in any culture are given different, common names that distinguish them from each other (e.g. shame and guilt). Yet what elements form a particular emotion, and differentiate it from the others? Gordon identifies at least 4 components:

1. *Bodily sensations:* Physiological arousal may be more noticeable in short, intense emotions, but may also lie in the background in others, even if not so consciously intrusive. For sociologists, these sensations are not really significant unless expressed in social action.

2. *Expressive Gestures and Actions:* An emotion's visible expression is through facial and bodily displays and instrumental actions. While there is some controversy about the universality of facial expressions for particular emotions, the fact is that these are often masked or concealed in actual interaction. As such, the so called "natural prototype" of facial expression is of less sociological interest than the socialized, culturally specific form of the component that actually occurs in social interaction.

3. *A Social Situation or Relationship:* An emotion is usually a reaction to a social situation or change in relationship. Since the person cognitively responds to the situation as s/he interprets it, different qualities of emotions (e.g. such as pride, indignation, grief and enthusiasm) reflect different appraisals about the meanings of social situations or relationships.

4. *Emotional Culture:* For every emotion, we learn associated vocabulary, norms and beliefs. Emotional culture allows members of a society to identify and discuss emotions, evaluate them

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as desirable or undesirable, and regulate them in line with values and norms.

It is important to comment here on two polar positions on emotional differentiation are important. One (the psychological) defines emotions as either a universal set of innate responses; the other (the anthropological) sees emotions essentially as culturally specific social patterns. The former position, which claims we have universal, innate emotions as found in facial expressions, cannot be pushed too far. While we must consider biological and psychological limiting conditions that constrain the social construction of emotions, these may have been more important during the evolutionary past (e.g. surprise and disgust aren't that significant for social structures). Perhaps it would be better to search for sociologically basic emotions as related to interaction in a particular social structure (e.g. sympathy, group loyalty, resentment, etc.) On the other hand, anthropological research illustrates that, unlike our Western ideas where emotions refer largely to private feelings, many cultures refer emotions to social relationships, as public performances that make a statement about a situation or social relationship. Nevertheless, while this view is more compatible with the sociological perspective, there are problems in the cross-cultural translation of emotion words. Research and clarification is needed, but it may be a useful starting point to classify cultures as centering around feeling, expressions, situations or norms, according to which component is emphasized in the cultural definition/ collective reactions therein.

Differentiation as the Labeling of Arousal:

Gordon argues that emotion should be viewed as an open system in which the entire combination of elements is socially constructed, rather than a closed system where society merely activates or stimulates existing, fixed connections (e.g. biologically, from feeling to expression). Yet, while trying to avoid the oversimplification of biological reductionism, he also seeks to integrate social influences with a physiological substrate.

While initially favoring Schachter's two factor theory, where emotions are produced by interaction between physiological responses and cognitive appraisal of their causes (e.g. social sources and social labels), Gordon doesn't feel this is a sufficient explanation since the original experiment's conclusions have been challenged. Specifically: (1) arousal may not be necessary for emotion, simply a belief that one is aroused; (2) undifferentiated arousal of some unknown origin may not be experienced as neutral, but negative; (3) unexplained arousal emerges only under highly restrictive conditions, and is unusual in everyday life.

Thus, an item for Gordon's agenda is to reexamine psychological theories of emotion to see what can be saved for sociological use. These theories describe psychological processes through which social structure may influence individual emotion (e.g. misinterpreted arousal can intensify or augment existing emotional experience, and unintentionally transferred from one similar emotion to another). We might ask in what social structures such things are likely to occur, what circumstances would obscure the true causes of arousal, etc. Thus, without conceding the validity of psychological theories, we can develop their implications for analysis of emotions in social life.

Vocabulary of Emotions:

Sociologists are interested in the cultural vocabulary of words used to identify emotions in self and others. These are composed of labels for emotions that are: (1) common experiences; (2) significant interactional concerns; and (3) sufficiently distinguished from each other. Modern languages contain hundreds of emotion names (e.g. 786 on a 1987 survey of what people saw on TV). This is almost certainly greater than the range of internal sensations we can discriminate or the variety of facial expressions than we can recognize.

Precision in Emotion Vocabulary: A vocabulary sensitizes people disproportionately to some facets of feeling, behavior and situation. Those emotions finely discriminated in language are probably those important for making subtle distinctions in socially crucial relationships and institutions (e.g. family, economy, government, religion). These terms may not only indicate valued emotions, but warn against varieties of a dangerous emotion that must be controlled. While research to date has largely focused on non-Western societies, this should be extended to social structural variations in our own society. Similarly, we ought to research difficult emotions that we find hard to peg with a name, or those so broad that they are only grossly discriminated by language (e.g. sadness).

Emotion Prototypes: Most vocabulary studies have merely analyzed horizontal distinctions across parallel categories of emotion. A new approach would be to conceive of emotions as organized hierarchically from a highly abstract level (e.g. negative emotion) to a middle level (anger or fear) to a very specific level (alarm, panic, dread). The middle level (emotion prototypes) is used most often, is often agreed on, and its terms are used as scripts for interpreting our own and others' emotions in terms of typical antecedents, behaviors, and attempts at self-control. According to Gordon, these prototypes are essentially micro-concepts of social structure describing typical, stable relational and interactional patterns. He feels research should be focused on how these are developed in society, acquired in socialization, employed to make sense out of experience, and used to detect deviant emotions. He also feels that we need to know how these change over time.

Ordinary Language for Emotion: Gordon asserts that most vocabulary studies have focused on formal word lists, such as nouns for emotional states. Studies are needed of ordinary conversations in which emotions are discussed using slang, folk sayings, and other informal, technically incomplete or ambiguous language.

A Research Agenda on Neglected Emotions:

Certain emotions such as love, fear, anger, grief and jealousy have received the most attention, but remain poorly understood (e.g. intense anger has been focused on, not the more common mild irritation). Of the so-called universal basic emotions, surprise and disgust have received little attention, despite their social implications for catching people off guard, challenging, or stigmatizing them. There is a long list of emotions that need to be examined in

relation to their social structural bases (e.g. pride, awe, patriotism, boredom, regret, gratitude and hatred).

Analyzing the Social Structural Differentiation of Emotions:

The study of social-structural differentiation of emotions is often uncertain, partly because of the difficulty of reliably detecting the shifting emotional patterns by which particular social relationships , feelings, expressions and norms differentiate and recombine. Yet several basic questions emerge:

1. What are the social structural and cultural circumstances required to experience and express a particular emotion? (e.g. Medieval *"accidie"* - boredom, gloom and fear resulting from laziness in performing one's religious obligations).

2. Are some groups affected more directly by the differentiation of new emotions than others? (e.g. an open mobility system causing upward comparisons, and resentment among those striving for success - particularly among those at the bottom).

3. Are existing emotions differentiated or elaborated in response to structural changes (e.g. does jealousy and romantic commitment become more salient in marriage where the sex ratio of women to men is scarce?)

4. Does structural transformation produce changes across a range of different emotions (e.g. the separation of the bourgeois dwelling from the workplace fostering increased feelings of family intimacy, comfort, domestic coziness and annoyance at intruding visitors).

Socialization of Emotions:

We now move to the second intervening process between social structure and emotion: socialization. This enables the growing child to develop the cognitive and behavioral skills to act within emotional culture. While the original sense of this term was to tame inborn human nature - making impulses and behavior fit social life, a tenet of the social structure and personality tradition was that the content of socialization corresponds to functional requirements of the society. If innate emotions were seen as serving adaptive evolutionary functions, perhaps socialized emotions could motivate individuals to strive for collective goals, and also promote social control of behavior through empathy, embarrassment, guilt and shame. The content and importance of various emotions should correspond to structural factors such as the kinship system, division of labour, stratification hierarchy, etc. Socialization goals and processes should be a key link between the larger social order and the emotional experiences that motivate and regulate individuals.

Socialization Processes:

The fundamental processes of emotional socialization involve rewards and punishments

to either encourage appropriate or inhibit inappropriate emotion. Modeling and identification are also important with regard to the emotional models set by significant others. Caregivers also label emotions for children, indicate the logic of consistency between components as well as the appropriate expressions. Caregivers goals and techniques are guided by their standards for developing an adult emotional character , and their beliefs about the emotional nature of children.

Of course, cognitive and motor development set limiting conditions on this shaping of emotions by social structure. The abilities to recognize, express, feel and control emotions depend upon development of the self-concept, empathic role-taking ability, and the decline of early childhood egocentrism.

Children learn emotions in the course of adjusting to interaction with others, becoming aware that an emotional display can serve as an interactional technique and resource (e.g. the consequences and tactical advantages of shame and guilt).

Structural change alters intervening institutions, such as the family and school, where children are socialized and adjust to emotional situations (e.g. separation of home from workplace increased women's prominence as an emotional model).

A Social-Structural Research Agenda on Socialization:

Emotional Competence: Every society and sub-group direct their socialization of members in line with their conceptions of the knowledge and abilities required to be emotionally competent, and this varies with structural components (e.g. gender). Research is needed on the varying emotional skills, vocabulary and norms that permit members to feel, express, recognize and control emotions as effective participants in group life. It is also needed on the degree to which such ideals diverge from what is actually effective.

Favored Temperament: How does inborn emotional disposition affect selection for differential socialization into social roles? Since infants differ in emotional sensitivity, activity level, quality of mood, introversion, and other emotional tendencies, will some be emotionally favored - seen as in line with culturally preferred styles - and not only be seen as more competent, but candidates for socially central roles? Will others be more likely to be seen as deviant and relegated to less favored roles? Moreover, will the types that are culturally favored at one time change with structural changes? (e.g. in the economy).

Differential Exposure to Emotions: If exposure to an emotion is a necessary precondition for being able to conceptualize and adopt it, and if a person's position in the social structure determines the type, frequency and duration of emotions around them, then this will affect the emotions one learns, experiences, expresses, and has to manage (e.g. Puritans instilled fear of damnation; modern society requires civility and self control - more so in some settings and for particular structural locations than others).

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Diverse Socialization: Individuals are socialized by various agents and groups who often hold contradictory views about emotions. Marginal individuals in several groups may be able to adopt the orientations of each about a subject, but feel mixed emotions themselves on the matter. Effects of diverse socialization should be investigated among individuals who are mobile across different emotional subcultures of class or ethnicity, or who interact mainly with members of other subcultures. Research on the effects of diversity among socialization agents should inform us about how individuals acquire a range of vocabularies, norms and expressive styles, and how such diverse socialization becomes integrated in a person's emotional behavior and experience.

Socialization Sequence: Attention should also be focused on the sequence and continuity of socialization. Children develop a culturally competent understanding of some emotions before others, reflecting differential emphases placed on various emotions. Research should examine how the degree of continuity (or merging of content) with these influences the internalization of emotional culture as children grow older. As abstract concepts, sequence and continuity can be employed to analyze the socialization of emotions in family, occupations and other structural settings.

Ultimately, emotional socialization is an adaptation to the interactional demands of one's position in the social structure, as well as induction into the emotional culture of a society.

Management of Emotions:

We don't simply feel emotions, but also work to create, intensify, suppress and transform them. We manage our expression by intentionally displaying gestures that differ from inner feeling - sometimes in conscious self-presentation, at other times through our habitual adherence to norms for appropriate contextual emotional displays. Similarly, we manage our feelings themselves by modifying our cognitive and somatic experience (e.g. through suppressive tactics or reinterpretation of situations).

The Nature of Emotion Norms:

The effect of emotion norms on experience and expression has been much studied, but conceptual and research questions remain. For example, it is often simply assumed that emotion norms are explicit, internalized by all members of society, and followed completely. This is an oversimplification. Inquiry should focus on the following:

Negotiation of Emotion Norms: Since norms prescribe a permissible range of feeling, and are often vague and incomplete, people have to fill in missing details and choose among competing norms. Hence, research should investigate structural factors bearing on ambiguity, as well as how people and groups debate, negotiate and bargain over a norm's content and applicability.

Internalization of Norms: Norms are not always internalized deeply to motivate and direct behavior. They also serve as excuses, accounts and rationalizations of behavior. It may be important to distinguish between social interactions in which norm-following is consciously

sincere, automatic and habitual, or half-hearted and cynical excuses after the fact.

Formal Emotional Culture:

Statements of norms can be found in a variety of sources, ranging from sociological research through sermons, court records, self-help books, etc. Yet, such sources have an uncertain status in their relevance to actual emotional experience and expression. Emotional culture can be distant from actual emotion in some areas, and very close to it in others. When credible, such documents provide detailed information about the history of emotions, and, if used in socialization, may act as self-fulfilling prophecies by shaping emotions in their image (e.g. changes in advice re: expressing marital love and anger in U.S. women's magazines during the past century. These showed a non-linear trend toward equating love with self-fulfillment, and increased advocacy for more open expression of anger. Both were affected by the depression, WWII and the emergence of the women's movement).

Generality of Control Across Individuals and Emotions: Even in tightly integrated communities, individuals differ in their degree of emotional control. Higher status brings the privilege of freer, more spontaneous emotional expression, lower status the reverse. Social structure therefore determines for whom emotional regulation is stringent or permissive.

A second, and related issue is whether this need for differential emotion management treats all emotions equally, or whether certain emotions are affected more than others (e.g. while some emotions in a social position are tightly regulated, others may be freely felt and displayed). Research is needed on which emotions are more regulated and which more openly permitted.

Stability of Emotional Control: The variability over time of emotional restraint in a society is another dimension for investigation. For example, are we more expressive or more restrained now than in the past - or both? How quickly does control shift to expression and back again? What type of structural conditions underlie these patterns?

Legitimation of Emotion Norms:

Research is needed into the legitimation of emotions, the process by which an expression or feeling is publicly authorized as appropriate by formal or informal authority.

Emotional Expertise: The emergence of emotion experts in this past century could be studied (e.g. changes in the regulation of anger promoted by physicians, marital advisors, psychologists, etc.). There appears to have been a shift away from religious leaders to psychologists and doctors as primary advice-givers about love and anger. These reflect formal scientific and intellectual ideas that have filtered down into folk beliefs through popularized social science.

Legitimation by Ethnopsychology: Emotions are also legitimated by language, proverbs, wise sayings and legends, collectively having the authority of folk knowledge (e.g. "true love never runs smooth").

Changes in Legitimation: Research is needed on the rise and fall of emotion norms as they become legitimated and de-legitimated. For example, styles, fads and fashions which may change and filter down through social classes and be abandoned as passe' when something new comes along.

Institutionalization of Emotions:

Emotions may be legitimated by becoming attached to social institutions (e.g. marriage with love and sexual expression; the military with organized anger). It may be that social institutions may have developed partly to control emotions (e.g. religion to deal with death and loss). Institutionalization stabilizes and formalizes the occasion, expression and social meaning of an emotion.

Institutions have authority to organize rituals arousing the emotion, to settle disputes over proper expression and feeling, and otherwise holds sovereignty over the emotion (e.g. the Medieval church and religious feelings).

Weber initiated discussion of this with his analysis of the routinization of charisma, where a leader's personal charm became transferred to a bureaucracy. Love and friendship become routinized to serve the purposes and ideals of institutions (e.g. military units, fraternities). This builds solidarity while reducing variation among individuals so they can cooperate efficiently.

Institutionalization of emotion norms is likely to occur within relatively closed communities with a strong sense of external opposition, extensive internal competition, and a distinctly articulated, pyramidal structuring of relationships.

Consistency Across Institutions: Institutions often overlap in control over an emotion (e.g. work norms and anger being transferred to home life, thereby helping prepare children to become new workers). Sociologists should investigate the problems and solutions developed when institutions compete for authority over an emotion.

Resistance to Institutionalization: The tension between spontaneity and institutional control of emotion is basic. Are the former real expressions of one's "deeper" self, and the latter artificial, trite and unreflective of who one is? That essentially depends on what one takes as the locus of one's self-concept. For one with an impulsive locus, the former may seem true. For one who emphasizes an institutional framework of self, sudden loss of control, for example, does not reflect one's true nature at all.

Deinstitutionalization of Emotion: Does institutionalization of emotions increase continuously over time, or do these ever become idiosyncratic again? For example, the emotions associated with friendships were once institutionalized, but friendship rituals have diminished, and friendship choice and interaction have been relegated to personal preference. Courtship is another example.

Institutionalization and legitimation are both tenuous and changeable processes (e.g. ritualized anger and aggression among British working class soccer fans pursued within recognized limits as a "liberating excitement" or "controlled de-controlling of the emotions"). Once someone dies, though, such institutionalization takes a hit and legitimation wavers.

This brings us to the final question: how do the emotions of individuals influence social structure?

Individual Effects on Social Structure:

While emotions have often been seen as dependent variables, it would be useful to look at them as intervening variables in the maintenance, modification or disruption of society. What is it specifically that emotions do to reproduce or modify social structure? Some possibilities include:

1. *Motivating behavior*: At the level of individual behavior, being emotional may strengthen task persistence, improve memory, or increase the likelihood of acting altruistically. It may be that emotionally-motivated social behaviors occur more rapidly and memorably and have a stronger effect on the persistence of structural patterns of relationships.

2. *Communicating Reactions and Intentions:* Emotion has a signal function, to convey one's reactions, evaluations and behavioral impulses to others. Being excited, bored or angry indicates differential support, respect and deference for a group or relationship and its place in the social structure.

3. *Revealing Identities and Values:* Emotional reactions are salient cues about a person's identities (e.g. class, status, age) and the particular role or standpoint that one is taking in a social situation. If emotions are commonly aroused when one's expectations and values are fulfilled or violated, a display of emotion can be a strategic warning that one is deeply committed to these and will be difficult about it if pushed.

4. *Generalization of Emotional Temperament and Style:* Different temperaments and styles can alter social structure depending on the structural position of emotional models and their distribution across prominent statuses and roles. Some individuals become important emotional role models because of their power, charisma, access to mass media and other status advantages (e.g. movie stars). Public figures often set standards for emotional reactions, which, when emulated en masse, can change social structure (e.g. Martin Luther King, Ghandi).

In addition to personal role models, the redistribution of gender, age, and ethnic groups across structural roles can produce widespread changes in emotional reactions (e.g. women in the workplace).

Conclusion:

This review of Gordon's work reveals a wealth of concepts and hypotheses, but doesn't detail research methods for investigating them. He feels that the integration of social structure with individuals' emotions can be studied through various standard methods of social science, depending on the topic and available data sources. The main thing is that the researcher should be flexible and interdisciplinary, becoming familiar with theories, concepts, methods and approaches in psychology, anthropology and social history. The intellectual task for sociologists, then, is to be able to move horizontally across disciplines and vertically through scales of analysis in order to trace an emotion or set of emotion processes between the larger social structure and the individual level of experience and behavior.