

Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

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Overheads Classes 12-13:

Steven Gordon: Social Structural Effects on Emotions

* Research on emotion may revitalize/reintegrate the social structure and personality paradigm

I. 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.

Structural: persisting patterns of social relationships
establish situational contingencies and constraints
motivate behavior
instigate emotion.

Cultural: emotion vocabularies,
norms
beliefs about emotion

* Research is needed to see to what degree structural and cultural effects coincide or differ.

2. *Intermediary Social Structures:*

* Structural influence on emotion - and vice versa - seen as mediated through smaller groups or institutions in which individuals directly participates.

3. *Specification of Factors:*

* The sociology of emotion should specify these proposed micro-macro linkages and test alternative links.

4. *Stability of Components:*

* Which emotional components are open to influence from social structure, and which are more intractable?

* Physiology = stable core.

* Social construction more evident in:

emotion vocabularies
rules governing expression and feeling
situational definitions of meanings, and
purposeful behavior.

* Central component = definition of the situation.

5. *Content vs. Abstract Analytical Variables:*

* Instead of specific emotions, relationships, institutions or periods, should focus on common social processes/abstract concepts across emotions

* Danger is that in different societies these may vary.

6. *Relativity of Emotion Psychology:*

* Theories of emotion developed in one society may not apply to explain emotions in others.

7. *Dynamics of Social Change in Emotions:*

* The dynamics of social change in emotion have been left largely unexplored.

* Major social change has implications for:

- (1) relationships/ groups in which emotions are experienced;
- (2) courses of behavior by which emotion is expressed;
- (3) emotion vocabularies;
- (4) emotion norms; and
- (5) personal temperaments/ styles of emotion that a society favors.

8. *Individual Effects on Social Structure:*

* Emotional experiences intervening variables mediating individual effects on social structure.

II. Defining a Sociological Approach to Emotions:

* The socially emergent dimensions of emotion include:

1. *Origin:* Cultural definitions of human relationships, not biology;

2. *Time:* Not just present; past interactions & anticipations of future contacts.

3. *Structure:* Meaning evokes specific feelings displayed through expressive gestures and instrumental actions, to which other people respond.
Components vary as structural/ cultural factors change.

4. *Change:* Micro-level change in emotion can be socially caused, not merely psychological. Macro level change can result from historical trends in cultural advice.

* Three social processes link the larger social structure with the emotional experience and behavior of individuals:

(1) *Differentiation*: societies and subgroups distinguish in their language/ social behavior among many types of an emotion;

(2) *Socialization*: individuals learn to feel, attend to, express and recognize the particular emotions identified in their society;

(3) *Management*: the regulation of both expression and feeling according to norms of appropriateness.

* Each will be discussed in turn.

(1) Differentiation of Emotions:

* What elements form a particular emotion, and differentiate it from others?

1. *Bodily sensations*
2. *Expressive Gestures and Actions*
3. *A Social Situation or Relationship*
4. *Emotional Culture*

* Pure psychological /anthropological positions each problematic

* Research/ clarification is needed

* Starting point: classify cultures as centering around above elements according to which component is emphasized in cultural definition/ collective reactions.

(i) Differentiation as the Labeling of Arousal:

*Emotion= an open system in which the entire combination of elements is socially constructed, not a closed system where society merely activates or

stimulates existing, fixed connections

* Gordon seeks to integrate social influences with a physiological substrate.

* Should reexamine psychological theories of emotion/ see what can be saved for sociological use.

(ii) Vocabulary of Emotions:

* Emotion words/labels reference numerous phenomena that are:

(1) common experiences;

(2) significant interactional concerns; and

(3) sufficiently distinguished from each other.

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.

* These terms may not only indicate valued emotions, but warn against varieties of a dangerous emotion that must be controlled.

Emotion Prototypes:

* Emotions should be conceived 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) are essentially micro-concepts of social structure describing typical, stable relational and interactional patterns.

* He feels research should be focused on these.

Ordinary Language for Emotion:

* Studies are needed of ordinary conversations in which emotions are discussed using slang, folk sayings, and other informal language.

(iii) A Research Agenda on Neglected Emotions:

*Many emotions need to be examined in relation to their social structural bases (e.g. pride, awe, patriotism, boredom, regret, gratitude and hatred).

(iv) Analyzing the Social Structural Differentiation of Emotions:

Several basic questions emerge:

1. What are the social structural and cultural circumstances required to experience and express a particular emotion?
2. Are some groups affected more directly by the differentiation of new emotions than others?
3. Are existing emotions differentiated or elaborated in response to structural changes?
4. Does structural transformation produce changes across a range of different emotions?

(2) Socialization of Emotions:

* Socialization enables children to develop the cognitive and behavioral skills to act within emotional culture.

* Socialized emotions could:

- motivate individuals to strive for collective goals

- promote social control of behavior through empathy, embarrassment, guilt and shame.

* The content and importance of various emotions should correspond to structural factors.

* A key link between the larger social order and emotional experiences.

(i) Socialization Processes:

* Emotional socialization involve rewards and punishments, modeling and identification.

* Caregivers also label emotions, indicate the logic of consistency between components, and appropriate expressions guided by standards and beliefs.

* Cognitive and motor development set limiting conditions.

* Children learn emotions while adjusting to interaction with others.

* Structural change alters intervening institutions.

(ii) A Social-Structural Research Agenda on Socialization:

Emotional Competence:

* Taught ideals of emotional competence vary with structural components.

* Research is needed on these, as well as 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?

* Will the types that are culturally favored at one time change with structural changes?

Differential Exposure to Emotions:

* Position in social structure/different exposure to emotions may affect the emotions one learns, experiences, expresses, and has to manage.

Diverse Socialization:

* Individuals are socialized by various agents and groups who often hold contradictory views about emotions.

* Effects of diverse socialization should be investigated (e.g. across emotional subcultures).

Socialization Sequence:

* Attention should be focused on the sequence and continuity of socialization.

* 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.

(3) Management of Emotions:

* We work to create, intensify, suppress and transform emotions.

* We manage our expression by intentionally displaying gestures that differ from inner feeling (self-presentation vs. habitually adhering to norms).

* We manage our feelings by modifying our cognitive and somatic experience (through suppressive tactics or reinterpretation of situations).

(i) The Nature of Emotion Norms:

* Emotion norms are not explicit, internalized by all members of society, and followed completely. Hence, research should focus on:

Negotiation of Emotion Norms:

- * Structural factors bearing on normative ambiguity
- * How people and groups debate, negotiate and bargain over a norm's content and applicability.

Internalization of Norms:

* Empirical distinction between encounters where norm-following is consciously sincere, automatic and habitual, and those where norms serve as excuses, accounts and rationalizations of behavior.

(ii) Formal Emotional Culture:

- * Statements of norms can be found in a variety of sources.
- * Emotional culture can be distant from actual emotion in some areas, and very close to it in others.
- * Credible cultural documents provide information about the history of emotions, and, if used in socialization, may act as self-fulfilling prophecies by shaping emotions in their image.

Generality of Control Across Individuals and Emotions:

- * Emotional freedom and control varies by status.
- * Which emotions are more regulated and which more openly permitted for

various status positions?

Stability of Emotional Control:

* The variability over time of emotional restraint in a society is an issue

* Does this change with structural conditions?

(iii) Legitimation of Emotion Norms:

*Legitimation:, the process by which an expression or feeling is publicly authorized as appropriate by formal or informal authority. Issues:

Emotional Expertise:

* The emergence of emotion experts in this past century could be studied.

Legitimation by Ethnopsychology:

* How emotions are legitimated by language, proverbs, wise sayings and legends, collectively having the authority of folk knowledge.

Changes in Legitimation:

* Research is needed on the rise and fall of emotion norms as they become legitimated and de-legitimated.

(iv) Institutionalization of Emotions:

*Emotions may be legitimated by becoming attached to social institutions.

* It may be that social institutions may have developed partly to control emotions.

* Institutionalization stabilizes and formalizes the occasion, expression and social meaning of an emotion.

Consistency Across Institutions:

* Research should investigate the problems and solutions developed when institutions compete for authority over an emotion.

Resistance to Institutionalization:

* Tension exists between spontaneity and institutional control of emotion.

* Which are “real” expressions of one’s deeper self?

* Depends on locus of self-conflict (institution vs. impulse).

Deinstitutionalization of Emotion:

* Does institutionalization of emotions increase continuously over time, or do these ever become idiosyncratic again?

* Institutionalization and legitimation are both tenuous and changeable processes (e.g. institutionalization of “liberating excitement” becoming delegitimated when sports violence).

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

(4) Individual Effects on Social Structure:

* Emotions=intervening variables in the maintenance, modification or disruption of society. How?

1. *Motivating behavior:*

* Being emotional may strengthen task persistence, improve memory, or increase the likelihood of acting altruistically.

* Emotionally-motivated social behaviors may occur more rapidly, memorably, and have a stronger effect on the persistence of patterned relationships.

2. *Communicating Reactions and Intentions:*

* Emotion conveys one's reactions to others, indicating differential support, respect and deference for groups, relationships, and their place in the social structure.

3. *Revealing Identities and Values:*

* Emotional reactions are salient cues about a person's identities, values and the particular standpoint that one is taking in a social situation.

4. *Generalization of Emotional Temperament and Style:*

* Some individuals become important emotional role models because of their power, charisma, access to mass media and other status advantages.

* The redistribution of gender, age, and ethnic groups across structural roles can produce widespread changes in emotional reactions.

Conclusion:

* This review of Gordon's work reveals a wealth of concepts and hypotheses, but doesn't detail research methods for investigating them.

* Gordon feels that the integration of social structure with individuals' emotions can be studied through various standard methods of social science.

* The main thing is that the researcher should be methodologically flexible and interdisciplinary in focus.