

## Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

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### Overheads Class 14: Michael Hammond: Affective Maximization

There are three parts to Hammond's model:

- (1) The general structural pattern that affective attachments are likely to take;
- (2) An analysis of how social differentiation might mimic this pattern;
- (3) An outline of the consequences of this symmetry for the evolution of social differentiation.

Each will be dealt with in turn.

#### **The Basic Pattern of Hierarchical Differentiation:**

1. Individuals will seek actions marked by non-distressful, positive arousal.
2. Except perhaps in early infancy, extensive instinctual guidelines for arousal do not exist.
3. Given this, and our extensive cognitive capacities, humans can manipulate their worlds to increase the likelihood of positive arousal.
4. Individuals will try to shape their worlds, consciously or unconsciously, to evoke a strong pattern of such arousal. Their success depends on their circumstances. The pursuit of strong, secure affective arousal is called "affective maximization."
5. Individuals will pursue affective maximization even in the face of major negative consequences.
6. In the quest for affective maximization, individuals will seek to increase the likelihood of positive arousal through affective attachment (recurring affective arousal attributable to individuals, ideas, objects, etc).

7. Instinctual guidelines to specify attachments do not exist, hence, many potential ties exist.
8. Once an attachment is established, it is not necessarily unbreakable, and must be reinforced.
9. An effective long term strategy of affective maximization would be to create multiple ties.
10. Human physiological capacity for affective arousal is finite. This limits the number of affective ties at any given time, and those to whom deep bonding is made. This results in uneven attachment. This uneven attachment produces differentiation.
11. In the pursuit of affective maximization, hierarchical differentiations that rank-order the desirability of certain affective ties are most efficient.

### **Cognitive and Time Constraints:**

\* Two developments are likely to emerge from hierarchical differentiation of affective attachments:

- (1) The use of information criteria for evaluating attachments; and
- (2) The embodiment of these differentiation criteria.

These suggest the next two steps in Hammond's model:

12. Given individual limitations in time and information processing capacity, individuals will mix-low information and high information ties in the pursuit of affective maximization.
13. Given these same limitations, individuals will seek to embody their ties in order to increase the likelihood of arousal.

### **Social Differentiation:**

14. Given the precariousness of emotional ties to specific individuals, one maximization strategy would be to mix these with broader attachments, such as to gender groups, occupations, ethnic communities or the like.

15. Since people have to choose their attachments on the basis of the information they can collect, pre-existing classification systems developed by others may save a great deal of time and energy.

16. Social differentiation, as a preexisting classification for uneven attachment, is an almost irresistible framework within which to pursue affective maximization.

17. Socially differentiated attributes are likely to be hierarchically ranked in terms of their desirability.

18. Embodied hierarchical differentiations are likely to be more effective in guaranteeing long-term arousal than purely abstract categorizations.

19. Embodiments marked by social inequality are particularly effective in terms of establishing uneven attachment. This:

- (a) may be based on resources available for their arousal potential;
- (b) can reinforce activities that already have affective appeal;
- (c) can aid the selection of affective attachments through elimination;
- (d) can serve to enhance attachment by providing a link to other affective foci (e.g. friendship);
- (e) can be a means to an end (e.g. acquiring or forging other affective ties).

### **Time and Social Differentiation:**

20. Social differentiations which endure in predictable form are more appealing than those which emerge, change or disappear randomly.

21. Expected differences between past, present and future can be hierarchized so that individuals invest in them emotionally (e.g. a framework where the future is expected to be better than the present).

## **Social Scale, Differentiation and Inequality:**

22. Individuals will seek some hierarchically differentiated social ties relatively low in information demands.

23. Under conditions of varying social scale, individuals construct social differentiations with interaction and information levels consonant with their own available time and cognitive capacities.

24. Changes in social scale create different levels of interaction and information available for affective attachment:

- As social scale increases (e.g. with technology and economic development), given the finite capacities of individuals, the amount of interaction time and detailed information shared by individuals decreases.

- It becomes more probable that political and economic inequality will emerge, since these affective boundaries require less personal information and interaction.

- These should emerge relatively late historically, given that other forms of hierarchical differentiation are available to provide guarantees of arousal and attachment in social groups with smaller scale.

### **Criteria For Social Differentiation in Small Scale Societies:**

\* Such criteria would likely require relatively low information, such as:

- age

- sex

- kinship

- sexual activity

- the distinction between the sacred and the profane

- status ladders based on personal achievement.

### **The Consequences of Increasing Scale:**

\* When social scale increases, average interaction time and the amount of

reciprocal information among individuals decline.

\* The likelihood increases that individuals will require more extreme forms of hierarchical differentiation to stake out their affective boundaries:

- concentrating affective attention on tangible, material objects
- turning to economic inequality

\* Given the technological limitations on production, particularly in the early stages, equal distribution would produce weaker boundaries than one where a few receive a lot of economic benefits.

\* Hence, the elites enjoy the unequal concentration of material goods, and other hierarchies are created to counter them.

\* A hierarchy of temporal differentiation is postulated in which the future is promised to be better for deprived groups than the present.

### **The Logic of Industrialization:**

\* With technological advancement and more surplus production, temporal differentiation could be more firmly anchored to this world:

- The relentless flow of “new and improved” goods/arousal possibilities
- Idea systems such as science - both fueling production and offering a highly valued affective framework
- Encountering a series of subcultures/ emotional experiences
- The increasing ease of divorce and remarriage

Each of these elements introduce an element of temporal change as a focus for affective weighting.

\* To state that there is an affective maximization logic in these changes is not to assert that this somehow guarantees human happiness or fulfillment.

\* Industrialization represents the furthest development in two master trends

of social evolution:

- (1) Increasing material embodiment; and
- (2) Increasing temporal differentiation in our affective attachment hierarchies

### **A Research Agenda in Affective Maximization:**

Hammond feels that research on his model should focus on:

- (1) Gathering qualitative reconstructions of the patterns in individuals' affective attachments.
- (2) The prediction that different cultures use different hierarchies to evoke similar affective arousal.
- (3) The prediction that within the same culture, different means might be used for the same affective ends.
- (4) The physiological markers of the relationship between hierarchical differentiation and affective arousal:
  - Do different hierarchies draw on the same physiological resources?
  - If so, are these resources finite?
  - As opportunities for arousal increase in some areas, do they necessarily decrease in others?
- (5) Changes in the hierarchical differentiation of sources of arousal over the course of individuals' lifetimes.
- (6) How growing numbers may produce motivational problems among affectively maximizing individuals with finite cognitive and affective capacities.
- (7) A review of the research on social patterns marked by both universality and tremendous historical variation (e.g. male-female social differentiation, kin calculation, and incest avoidance).

## **Conclusion:**

- \* This model provides a new link between the physiological and the sociological.
- \* By focusing analysis on the scale-sensitive qualities of affective arousal, a new macro-theory can be constructed and applied to historical change.
- \* Shows how certain social and idea structures are not only “good to think,” but “good to feel.”