<u>**Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions**</u>
<u>**Prof. J.S. Kenney**</u>

<u>**Overheads Class 18-19: Emotional Deviance**</u>

*Today we will introduce Peggy Thoits' concept of emotional deviance

Introduction:

* Because emotions at least partially social constructions, sociological concepts may be applied to them (e.g. norms=feeling/expression rules).

* It follows that just as behavior sometimes deviates from norms, so do many feelings and emotional displays.

* Thus emotional deviance is possible.

Implications:

* The concept of emotional deviance raises several interesting issues:

   - How prevalent is it?
   - What emotions are especially problematic?
   - Do these vary historically/cross-culturally?

* Theoretical issues:

   - Motivational (how are deviant emotions possible?)
   - Processual (how is emotion work accomplished? How fails?)
   - Applied substantive issues (how does this relate to other sociological
     issues, such as protest movements?)

* Emotional deviance also relevant to mental health literature/research

* In her paper, Thoits attempts to:

   - Raise tentative hypotheses
   - Suggest research strategies
   - Point to problems that require attention

Research Questions:

* Emotional deviance can be identified by taking the individual's perspective
* Emotional deviance =when a person reports his/her feelings or expressive behaviors differed from what s/he thought was expected in a situation

* Thoits' preliminary research took this approach:

   -Questioned 200 college students on +/- emotional experiences
   -Asked questions about guilt and shame
   -Emotion norms explicitly stated in 23.1% (-) and 10.7%(+) examples
   -Women gave more norms for (-) feelings; no difference for (+)
   -46% felt guilty/ashamed re: (-) reactions; 12% for (+)
   -30.7% who felt guilt/shame said feelings deviant (more women)
   -In overall sample, only 15.6% claimed feelings deviant
   -Emotional deviance real and socially patterned (more in negative experiences/ expressed more by women)

* Future research can use more sophisticated samples, methods, variables, and/or hypotheses:

   - Study variability of emotional deviance in social structure
   - Study relationship of emotional deviance to attributions/labels of
     mental illness

Studies of Conditions Generating Emotional Deviance:

* We should examine under what conditions people feel what they "shouldn't," or not feel what they "should."

* Possibilities:

- Socialization
- Time emotions take to dissipate
- Attention to memory= renewal of feelings
- Situational stimuli triggering emotion
- Multiple role occupancy
- Subcultural marginality
- Normative and non-normative role transitions
- Rigid rules governing ongoing roles and ceremonial rituals

* Related motivational issue: when are people willing to accept own emotional deviations and resist the sanctions of others:

- Suggests study of protest groups
- Deviant emotions becoming "normative"/buttressing actions
- Powerful dismissing protests as "emotional"/ illegitimate
- Role of emotions in cementing subcultures/social movements
- Hypothesis: without shared and validated emotional reactions among actors, an effective protest group would be unable to form /survive.

* Another issue: relationship of emotional deviance to joining self-help groups. Hypothesis: emotional validation and emotional legitimacy are key motivators and rewards.

Studies of Emotion-Management (Coping) Processes:

* Focus on the processes of managing deviant feelings

* Thoits accepts Hochschild's 4 factor definition of emotion:

- Situational cues   - Expressive gestures
- Physiological changes   - An emotion label

* Adds two primary modes individuals use to alter components of emotional

experience: behavioral and cognitive

* By crossing two primary *modes* and 4 *factors*, Thoits comes up with an 8-fold classification of emotion management for emotional deviance (* see table*)

* Partly illuminated by Thoits' student research. 10 most frequently mentioned management techniques (in descending order) were:

-Catharsis   -Leaving the situation
-Taking direct action   -Thinking the situation through
-Seeking support   -Thought stopping
-Hiding feelings   -Distraction
-Seeing the situation differently   -Acceptance

* The 5 most effective methods were seeking support, seeing the situation differently, catharsis, hiding feelings, & taking direct action.

*Actions and thoughts focused on the situation itself or on the expressive component of emotion were most frequently used and perceived as effective.

* Thoits found gender differences in these strategies. Social class and age issues need further investigation.

* Thoits also found that cognitive strategies such as acceptance may be utilized more frequently in uncontrollable situations.

* More research is needed.

Substantive Applications:

* The above issues are important and currently neglected topics in social change, stress and coping processes

* Attention to these emotional dynamics could be important in studies of

-Protest group formation
-Stress management

* Why is it that some people under stress become physically ill; others psychologically disturbed? (Impact of emotionl deviance on self-esteem?)

* Could it be that there are more unsuccessful emotion management attempts in relation to specific strategies/ components of emotion?

* Could emotional deviance be applied to the official/unofficial labeling of mental illness?

* Does emotional deviance enable the development of a theory of the social origin of mental illness? This would assert an interrelationship between:

- Structural conditions
- Prevalence/severity of emotional deviance
- Increased need for emotion management/ failures
- Eventual stigmatization/labeling as mentally ill
- Transformation into deviant identity/role/ "treatment"

* Emotions theory thus:

-Helps integrate distinct work on stress, coping, social support and psychological disorder
-Suggests new research hypotheses in mental health

* In the end, the concept of emotional deviance is a rich one, with theoretical and empirical implications for a number of substantive areas.

* Exploratory research into some of these issues should further refine our understanding of problems that have preoccupied sociologists for some time.

My Homicide Research: Victims as Emotional Deviants?

(i) The Problem:

* Labelling theory tends to focus largely on the offender.
* Implicit concern for the social situation as a whole.
* This logically includes the victim of crime.

(ii) Literature:

* Taylor, Wood and Lichtman (1983) discuss many labelling concepts in terms of the sympathetic - and not so sympathetic - treatment of victims *as victims,* and their *responses* thereto (e.g. primary and secondary victimization).

* Wortman and Lehman (1983) discuss social responses to victims of life crises. Findings:

    (i) Others often hold *negative feelings* about victims
    (ii) Experience a great deal of *uncertainty* about how to respond
    (iii) Hold *misconceptions* about how victims should react

* Individuals engage in three types of ostensibly supportive behaviors:

    (i) Discourage open expression
    (ii) Encourage recovery
    (iii) Fall back on automatic or scripted support attempts

* Victims may feel these ineffective and harmful because:

    (i) They encourage isolation with one's thoughts
    (ii) They dismiss victims' feelings as unimportant
    (iii) Imply victim should not feel as bad as s/he does

* Research backs this up (e.g. infant deaths/ victims losing friends)

(iii) Theoretical Discussion:

* Most broadly crime victims can be reacted to as (a) *victims* or (b) *deviants*.

* The label of *victim* has *three possible trajectories*:

  1. Victims may be reacted to as such, ascribed sympathy, and be offered unconstrained, accommodative support.

  2. Victims may be reacted to as such, ascribed sympathy, but others respond in ways indicating uncertainty or misconceptions about interaction.

  3. Victims may be reacted to as such, initially ascribed sympathy, but others eventually may stigmatize them as "helpless victims" unable to cope.

  As for labelling as *deviants*, victims may experience this in two ways:

  1. Victims may be reacted to as "emotional deviants" (Thoits, 1990) as the result of their "inappropriate" emotions in a particular social context (e.g. at a party).

  2. Victims may be stigmatized as deviants who are blamed for their plight in the first place (e.g. drug dealers who suffer an assault).

* Issues of *sympathy* and *stigmatization* are important matters not only for distinguishing between the labels of *victim and deviant*, but *also between the various responses to victims*.

* This revolves around Candace Clark's concept of "sympathy margin" - the limited amount of sympathy worthiness one is ascribed - which is continually renegotiated, and which may be used up.

* According to Clark, those who follow the "rules of sympathy etiquette" are ascribed more sympathy than those who do not.

* Important to examine the responses or *careers* of those so labelled.

* May elaborate a *parallel labelling process* for victims.

(iii) Methodology:

*This study involved the collection, transcription, and analysis of:

- 32 interviews
- 22 surveys
- 108 Criminal Injuries Compensation files

* All involved the experiences of those who had suffered the murder of a loved one

(iv) Results:

(a) Extended Family and Friends:

* A *minority* of respondents experienced widespread, *ongoing* support from the majority of their extended family and friends. (Qt)

* Sympathetic, and reportedly "helpful" responses included:

    -Visiting and staying
    -Providing ongoing emotional support
    -Handling responsibilities
    -Helpful communication (e.g. the ability of others to pick up
    subtle cues re: when / how to offer support.

* Demonstrates how some people may be reacted to as *legitimate victims*, who are *sympathy worthy*.

* A *majority* of respondents, however, experienced:

    (i) A generalized lack of support from the bulk of their extended family and friends;

(ii) That persisted over time. (3 Qts)

* Reportedly "unhelpful" responses included

    -Initial lack of support
    -Rapidly disappearing support (e.g. after the funeral)
    -"Inappropriate" attention and harassment
    -Avoidance by others
    -Problems with communication
    -Overt conflict.

* Some people considered that these varying responses were the result of their being labeled as *victims,* others as *deviants*

* Survivors' *rationales* for these "unhelpful" responses were instructive in separating these:

    (i) Some labelled as *victims* asserted how many of their extended family and friends were afraid to do or say anything that might upset them further, and avoided contact as a result (3 Qts)

    (ii) Others labelled as *victims* noted how the initially sympathetic responses of others eventually gave way to others privately urging them to "get on with your lives." (1 Qt)

    (iii) Some individuals felt that they were stigmatized as *emotional deviants* by others due to "inappropriate" behavior in public settings. (2 Qts)

    (iv) Some individuals were simply stigmatized as *deviants*. These were family members of individuals who were blamed, or somehow seen as contributing to their plight (2 Qts).

* Each of these rationales relate to: (i) Sympathy worthiness; &

(ii) The rules of sympathy etiquette

(b) Acquaintances, Strangers, & the Community:

* Respondents often noted receiving remarkable support from *mere acquaintances* (2 Qts)

* Acquaintances who labelled respondents as victims considered them as legitimately sympathy worthy as above, but their expression of sympathy was not so readily blocked by their own upset and familiarity with respondents.

* Respondents sometimes noted a groundswell of support from *strangers in the community* as well.

* Two factors were associated with this:

    (i)   Either the deceased, or their survivors, were well known, had much prior community involvement, or both (1 Qt);
    (ii)   Widespread sympathetic media coverage (1 Qt).

Indeed, it appeared that *some respondents were cast into the role of crusading victim advocates* in such a context (1 Qt).

* In cases where (i) was absent, sympathy margins were lessened (1Q)

* Where (ii) was absent as well, or the murder involved much negative coverage and/or the proliferation of rumors, there was greater stigmatization (1 Qt).

* Three negative responses occurred as a result:

(i) *Harassment* (1 Qt); (ii) *Blaming* (1 Qt); (iii) *Notoriety* (2 Qts)

- Whether the predominant label was deviant or victim, such respondents reported *revictimization* in their encounters with others in the community.

.

(c) Subjects' Responses:

* Generally, survivors could either:

 (i) Attempt to deal with things on their own; or
 (ii) Seek help.

* Two factors appeared to affect their response in this regard:

 (i) Their *gendered orientation to seeking help*; and
 (ii) A variety of *incentives/disincentives*

* With regard to *gender*

 - Males were far less likely to seek out help than females
 (e.g. imbalance of women in self-help, victims organizations, and
 counseling)

* As for *incentives and disincentives*, there were five interrelated
components:

 (i) Level of sympathetic support in respondents' social context
   (4 Qts)
 (ii) Type of encouragement to seek help (2 Qts)
 (iii) Level of stigmatization
 (iv) Additional victimizing encounters;
 (v) Availability of choices.

* Taking these factors together, *four patterns or "careers" emerged*:

(1) Not accepting the label of victim as definitive.

(2) Using the victim role as a defense or reaction (i.e. "secondary
victimization" either through altercasting or "revictimization," possibly

leading to formal labeling and/or subcultural involvement).

(3) Confronting, assessing, and rejecting the negative labels inherent in victimization and replacing it with a positive identity (i.e. "tertiary victimization" as an advocate or "survivor").

(4) Secondary deviance/ secondary emotional deviance, possibly added to by the formal labeling of control agents.

* All of these patterns were reflected in subjects' *utilization of the victim role*:

     (1) Some used the victim role *as a shield* to deflect responsibility and account for their failure to cope in a variety of contexts (1 Qt)

     (2) Others used the victim role *as a sword* to assign causes, specify remedies, and to generally fight for positive change (1 Qt)

     (3) In some circumstances subjects learned to self-presentationally *alternate* between the two as circumstances demanded (*volitional gerrymandering*).

(d) Conclusion:

* This research elaborates on the range of social responses to victims of crime, and their varying reactions.

* It takes the labelling process traditionally applied to offenders, and makes many theoretical comparisons in the experiences of victims.

* It identifies a parallel labelling process for victims, and differentiates between the two on the basis of sympathy, stigma, and a variety of interactional responses.