

# Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

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## Overheads Class 23:

### Emotions and Micro Social Processes I: Theodore Kemper

- \* Today we will examine the work of Theodore Kemper in more detail
- \* Many emotions result from real, imagined, or anticipated outcomes in social relationships.
- \* Therefore, we must specify the range of these relational outcomes
- \* Dyadic model of relationship (\*see chart\*):
  - 2 actors relating on power/status dimensions (own and other's)
  - possibilities of gain, continuation or loss
  - = 12 logically possible outcomes
- \* Any outcome for one may result in a corresponding outcome for the other. Also helps explain mixed emotions.
- \* Outcomes always due to an agent (understood from person's perspective):
  - self
  - other
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> party
- \* Different emotions may be directed towards the different parties involved based on agency (i.e. self, other and/or 3rd party). Ultimately this gives 7 possible outcomes.

Summing up Kemper's initial postulates, then:

1. Relationships between actors can be characterized by locating the actors relative to each other on the two relational dimensions of power and status;
2. In any interaction episode, up to 4 possible relational changes can occur simultaneously;
3. Relational changes are understood as gain or loss in the power and status positions of the actors vs a vis each other;
4. Continuity of the existing levels of power and status of the actors is also a possible outcome of an interactional episode;
5. When a relational change occurs or when there is continuity, some agent is responsible for the outcome;
6. Agents can be self, other, or 3<sup>rd</sup> party;
7. One can feel different emotions toward self, other, and 3<sup>rd</sup> party (if there is one) as a result of the same relational outcome.

### **A Theory of Emotions:**

\* Kemper defines emotion as: *"a relatively short term evaluative response essentially positive or negative in nature involving distinct somatic (and often cognitive) components."*

\* This definition essentially argues that emotions are:

- Relatively transitory
- Either gratifying or aversive
- Contain cognitive appraisals of the stimulus, situation or somatic state
- Distinguishable from other bodily states

\* Kemper terms longer term emotions “*sentiments*” (based on recurring or continuous stimulus situation where cognitive/somatic aspects don’t die out).

\* Kemper distinguishes between:

(1) *Structural emotions* which involves a degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the relational power/status dimensions

(2) *Anticipatory emotions* which relate to actors’ capacity to plan, hope and vaguely anticipate the future of their interactions/ relationships

(3) *Consequent emotions* following the relational outcomes of an encounter, linking structural and anticipatory emotions to the actual results of interaction

\* Today we will focus largely, though not exclusively, on the structural dimension, as this is what Kemper is best known for.

### **Structural Emotions:**

\* Structural emotions are broadly positive or negative in tone, but different relational channels give rise to different emotions.

\* We will first discuss an actor’s *own power* and *own status*:

-One may feel content or discontent with one or both of these.

-Contentment arises as the feeling that power and status are *adequate*

-Discontent can result from either a feeling of *excess* or *insufficiency*

-These relate to subjective perceptions, cultural definitions, and cue physiological results.

\* We will then move on to consider the structural emotions pertaining to the *power and status of the other*.

### **(1) Own Power:**

- \* When own power is viewed as *adequate*, it results in the person feeling *security*, comfort and a sense of ease.
- \* When a person feels *excess* power over another, s/he most often feels *guilt*.
- \* This is especially when *self* is seen as agent
- \* When *other* is seen as agent of one's excess power, *anger/hostility* results.
- \* When a person feels *insufficient* power, *fear and anxiety* result.
- \* This is especially when *self* is seen as agent.
- \* When *other* is seen as agent of one's insufficient power, fear and anxiety are merged/externalized with hostility in *anarchy-rebelliousness*.

### **(2) Own Status:**

- \* When one receives status in *adequate* amounts one should feel *happy*.
- \* When one receives *excess* status, one feels *shame*.
- \* When *self* is seen as the agent of *excess* status, the emotion is *embarrassment/humiliation*, resulting in: (i) acceptance of the lower status; (ii) withdrawal from interaction; or (iii) attempts at compensation.
- \* When *other* is seen as *agent* of one's excess status, shame is externalized into a form of *anger and hostility* toward the other (e.g. hypercriticism and attributions of perfectionism).
- \* When one receives *insufficient* status, the emotion experienced is *depression*.

\* When *self* is seen as the agent of *insufficient* status, depression takes the form of *despair, apathy or hopelessness*, with hostility directed at self.

\* When *other* is seen as *agent* of one's status insufficiency, depression is extrojected in the form of *anger and hostility*.

\* To summarize, 6 structural emotions are outcomes of ongoing relationships when one's own relational channels (own power and status) are the focus of attention:

- *Security* when own power is adequate
- *Guilt* and *fear-anxiety*, when own power is excessive or insufficient
- *Happiness* when own status is adequate
- *Shame* and *depression* when status is excessive or insufficient

### **(3) Other's Power:**

\* Relative correspondence between own and other's power positions:

- When one's own power is sufficient=other's power is "adequate" (security)
- When other's power is insufficient= one's own power is excessive (guilt)
- When other's power is insufficient= one's own power is excessive (anxiety)

### **(4) Other's Status:**

\* When one gives *adequate* status to the other, we feel satisfaction or contentment with self (*happiness*)

\* Conferring *excess* status on another appears to be an anomaly (since Kemper has defined giving status as *voluntary* compliance). However, *excess reward conferral* does occur, such as in conditions of flattery, or mistakenly inflated conceptions of the other's worthiness.

\* To accord *insufficient* status to another invokes *guilt* (and possibly shame).

\* When *self* is seen as the *agent*, the emotions of guilt and shame will be felt in their introjected modes: *remorse and regret*.

\* Where the *other* is seen as the *agent* responsible for one's failure to accord them deserved status, the other will be derogated and criticized (e.g. as a perfectionist).

\* In summary, Kemper proposes that:

- When self considers that the status given to the other is adequate, the structural emotion is happiness
- When insufficient status is given, the emotion is guilt/ shame
- A true excess of status conferral to the other is possibly a null cell

\* Kemper argues that the intensity of these structural emotions depends on the degree to which the four relational channels are favorable or unfavorable to the actor:

- Either objectively and according to common standards and particular conditions of the relationship
- Or subjectively, according to a more idiosyncratic interpretation of what is favorable and what is not.

\* Of the 12 various alternatives of the structural emotions outlined here:

- When all are positive, the person must feel quite content
- When all are negative, s/he must be quite discontent
- Most relationships involve a combination of adequate, excess and insufficient structural relations - in varying degrees of intensity.

\* Kemper's *anticipatory* emotions: 3 elements:

- Past power/status experience
- Optimism/pessimism
- Confidence/lack of confidence

\* Give rise to 4 feelings:

- (1) Optimism + confidence = serene confidence or happiness/contentment
- (2) Optimism + lack of confidence = guarded optimism or anxiety
- (3) Pessimism + confidence = grudging optimism or anxiety
- (4) Pessimism + lack of confidence = hopelessness or depression.

\* Kemper's socialization paradigm for guilt, shame, anxiety and depression:

Punishment types + coping responses:

- (i) power oriented; (ii) proportionality; and (iii) affection-oriented.

\* Kemper on love relations:

- Confer extremely high status on another
- Various types varying by who confers and power positions
- Distinguished from liking (adequate status/little power differential)

\* Empirical tests are promising.

\* Essentially, then, Kemper feels that this power-status model:

- Captures the complexity of emotional response in real life
- Systematically allocates the mix of conflicting emotions to particular relational sources.

\* However, it must be noted that his model rests on *at least* 3 important assumptions:

1. That its propositions are universal, valid for all social and demographic groups;
2. That social structure (i.e. power/status relations) instead of culture (i.e. norms and expectations) are the prime determinants of what emotion one

experiences;

3. That there is truly an important degree of integration between the social, the physiological and the emotions.

\* If any of these assumptions are empirically refuted, his theory would require major restructuring.