

Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

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Overheads Class 24:

Emotions and Micro Social Processes II: Thomas Scheff

* Scheff examines the role of shame in emotions:

Darwin: (1) Blushing is caused by shame;
(2) Shame is caused by the perception of negative evaluations of the self

McDougall: Shame one of self-regarding sentiments
Biological, and particularly social (self-consciousness)

* Low visibility pride and shame:

Cooley: Pride and shame are crucial self-feelings
May have low visibility
“Looking glass self:”

- (1) The imagination of our appearance to another person;
- (2) The imagination of his judgement of that appearance; and
- (3) Some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification

* Theoretical conclusions:

1. In adults, social monitoring of the self is virtually continuous, even in solitude (i.e. we are “living in the minds of others without knowing it”)
2. Social monitoring always has an evaluative component, and gives rise, therefore, to pride and shame.
3. Adults are virtually always in a state of either pride or shame, usually of a quite unostentatious kind.

* Scheff: self-esteem =balance of pride and shame states in a person's life.

The Recursiveness of Unacknowledged Shame:

* In modern societies the emotions of shame and pride often seem themselves to arouse shame (even blushing).

* Shame may be recursive, acting back on itself.

* If shame is evoked but not acknowledged, the possibility arises that one may react emotionally to one's initial emotional reaction, then react again to the second reaction, and so on (spirals).

* This may give rise to a chain reaction with no natural limit.

* In social settings, this moves beyond inner spirals into "triple spirals" (within self, within other, and between both parties).

* May be completed so quickly as to be almost invisible (videotapes illustrate)

* May occur between individuals, groups, etc.

Low Visibility Shame:

* Due to the recursive character of shame, pride and shame have low visibility

*How can we study them?

- Gottschalk and Gleser (1969): categorizing verbal texts
- Lewis (1971): observation of clinical interactions

* Lewis: most shame episodes were virtually invisible to the participants, and were acknowledged by neither the patient nor the therapist.

* Lewis: unacknowledged shame has 2 basic types:

- (1) Overt, undifferentiated shame
- (2) Bypassed shame

* Overt, undifferentiated shame:

- Involves painful feelings that are not identified as shame
- Labeled with a wide variety of terms disguising shame (“awkward”)
- Accompanied by nonverbal markers (e.g. stammering, averted gaze)
- May be characterized as “hiding” behavior.

* Thus, overt, undifferentiated shame occurs when:

1. One feels the self negatively evaluated, either by self or other;
2. Manifests “hiding” behavior, and/or
3. Labels or associates the painful feeling with undifferentiated terms.

* Bypassed shame:

- Begins with a perception of the negative evaluation of self
- Behavioral markers subtle and covert (e.g. quick speech, complaints of unresolved issues, distraction)

* In overt shame emotional pain obviously disrupts thought and speech. In bypassed shame, the pain is avoided before it can be completely experienced, through rapid thought, speech or actions.

* Two types of shame relate to:

- Scheff’s distinction between over/under distanced emotion
- Adler’s discussion of inferiority complexes/obsessiveness

* Lewis’ formulation provides the foundation for a testable theory

* These 2 basic patterns explain the puzzle of how shame might be ubiquitous, yet usually escape notice.

* Lewis' work also converges with:

- Freud's early work on repression
- Tompkin's work the cathartic expression of forgotten grief

Shame in Other Theories of Emotion:

* Tompkins, Goffman and Kemper have important things to say about shame, but none assigned it a central role in human behavior.

* Tompkins (1971):

- Referred to shame as "humiliation"
- Specialized psychological analysis
- Deals almost entirely with the internal, psychological side of shame
- Circular reasoning: incomplete reduction of interest or joy
- Little focus on social contexts that produce shame
- Ironic given behaviorist focus in psychology (e.g. Asch experiment)

* Goffman:

- Interaction between deference and emotion in interaction ritual
- Protection of "face" is seen as the dominant motive in social life
- Interactants exquisitely sensitive to deference extended and received
- Avoiding embarrassment is the goal that drives "face work"
- Yet stopped short of interaction between inner and outer events

* Kemper:

- Included social, psychological and biological concepts
- Primary focus on structural dimensions of power and status
- Falls short of comprehensive analysis/ pride and shame incidental

* Tompkins' and Kemper's theories reify one element as causal, minimizing the other (i.e. either internal processes or social structure). Either way, pride and shame denied as causal agents.

* Is this related to our cultural bias toward rational/material explanations?

* Blindness to the impact of pride/shame may blind us to their impacts on many types of social events and phenomena.

A Research Agenda: Socialization of Emotions and Learning:

* Scheff: shame, though disguised and denied, may nevertheless be crucial in the socialization of emotions.

* Shaming may result in difficulty resolving emotions, giving rise to intense or lengthy chain reactions.

* Shame in the caretaker in response to childrens' emotions could be of immense significance

- Flagrant shaming in response to childrens emotions
- Childrens' sensitivity to even mild or disguised reactions
- Inadvertent passing on of caretakers own unrecognized patterns of shame

* Gender factors:

- Women more field dependent (prone to overt shame)
- Men usually more field independent (prone to bypassed shame)
- Perhaps related to differential socialization techniques (overt shaming vs. silence and withdrawal)
- Analysis could help explain characteristic personality problems and common relationship difficulties

* Childrearing research:

- Possible focus on the manner of shaming accompanying punishment
- Possible focus on differences in language/math acquisition

Study Designs:

* Scheff favors videotape research to test hypotheses:

- Focus on situations where shaming frequent/infrequent
- Look at socialization of language

* Specifically, he wants to look at 2 different kinds of family settings:

- (1) In which the frequency of intense shaming and embarrassment is low; and
- (2) One in which it is high.

* Scheff argues that 4 areas where high levels of shame and embarrassment might be expected are:

- (a) The socialization of the infant's cry;
- (b) Its body functions;
- (c) Genital touching; and
- (d) Disputes.

*A second study would also explore the possibility that rigid patterns for socializing emotions are transmitted from generation to generation:

- Comparison of dispute tactics in 3 different generations
- A moment by moment videotape analysis of disputes
- Transmission hypothesis
- Different types of tactics relate to different types of shame/behavioral and learning outcomes

* If the theory outlined here provides an accurate account of socialization:

-It would explain both effective and disruptive learning with a single model

-It might carry forward the current interest in emotions into many new areas of research.