

Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

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Overheads Class 26:

Emotions and Micro Social Processes IV: Candace Clark

* The work of Candace Clark revolves around two themes:

- (1) her conceptualization of sympathy
- (2) her discussion of emotional micropolitics

We will deal with each in turn.

Sympathy Biography and Sympathy Margin:

- * Individuals may either be:
 - (i) considered “sympathy worthy”
 - (ii) blamed for their plight
- * May be distinguished on “sympathy margin” (i.e. leeway allowed)
- * Involves emotional credits ascribed by others to varying degrees
- * Continually negotiated
- * Closer relationships mean more margin available in “sympathy biography”
- * 4 Rules of “sympathy etiquette”:
 - Don't make false claims to sympathy (e.g. exaggerating/ crying wolf)
 - Don't claim too much sympathy (e.g. constantly whining)
 - Claim some sympathy when circumstances appropriate (e.g. don't brush it off)
 - Reciprocate to others for sympathy (e.g. if received in past, provide it)

* Deviant sympathizers:

- Underinvest by not recognizing others' rights to sympathy
- Overinvest by giving sympathy to unworthy

* Clark's theory relevant to social reactions towards victims of life crises.

Emotions and Micropolitics in Everyday Life: Some Patterns and Paradoxes of "Place"

* Micropolitics involves the creation and negotiation of hierarchy: getting and keeping power, rank, standing, or what she calls "social place."

* Emotions play an important part in micropolitics. In what follows, Clark will elaborate:

(1) how self-targeted emotions can serve as "place markers" about where one stands;

(2) how other-targeted emotions can serve as "place claims" about where one wants to stand;

(3) five "micropolitical strategies" in which actors can use their own emotions and elicit others' with place claims in order to assert, maintain, usurp, upset or deny a social placement.

The Concept of Social Place:

* While we share group life together, we are also divided by hierarchies.

* In a given encounter, one person generally has higher place than others.

* Place is to everyday interaction what social status is to social structure.

* Place is a less well-defined, micro-level position

- * Place encompasses factors like power, prestige, face to face status, and social distance (or intimacy).
- * Those occupying higher place have more esteem, privilege and rights.
- * Social actors are often uncertain about both the abstract notion of place, as well as about their own concrete place in a specific encounter.
- * At the same time that others try to place us, we place others and ourselves.
- * There are then multiple perspectives on a given person's place:
 - the "objective" (other constructed) viewpoint; and
 - the "subjective" (self-constructed) one.
- * These may quickly shift from concordance to discordance and back again.
- * Self-concept affects subjective sense of place and vice versa: it is an impermanent adjunct to self.
- * Traditional approach to place focused on combinations of cognitive and behavioral factors:
 - what people assume about their statuses
 - how they read verbal and nonverbal cues
 - the messages they receive from the self-concept
 - how they act.
- * Without attending to emotion, these explanations are incomplete.

Emotions and Place:

- * People assemble place configurations with the glue provided by emotions.
- * Constructing one's relative place involves self-evaluation and comparison.

- * Such comparisons evoke feelings of:
 - shame, pain, and belittlement, or
 - pleasure, pride and empowerment.
- * Sending a place message can evoke some of these feelings in the other.
- * Emotion conveys information about the state of the social ranking system: it informs us where we stand and tells others where they do or should stand.
- * Because of emotions, felt social place can persist over time/ across settings.
- * Alignment between objective & subjective place =satisfaction, pride & exultation
- * Divergence between objective & subjective place =anxiety, resentment or indignation
- * Emotions relate people to place:
 - *intrapersonally* (in place marking)
 - *interpersonally* (in place claiming)

Emotions as Place Markers:

- * Emotions relay messages to self about one's place in an encounter. Place reminders remind when they evoke emotions.
- * Place markers can operate in either a consequent manner or in an anticipatory manner.
- * To date, the most relevant research on emotions as place markers comes from studies of so-called "inferiors" submitted to extreme oppression.

- * In some, feelings of inadequacy vis a vis their oppressors led them to feel they deserved a subordinate place: they restructured their relationship with themselves.
- * Emotions can serve as place-markers in humiliating situations: since the other's feelings take precedence, one becomes emotionally invisible.
- * Emotional habits may also remind humiliated individuals of lower status.
- * Negative self-emotions can also incapacitate role-performance, creating the objective conditions for inferior status.
- * On the other hand, an actor may create fluster and anxiety in others by throwing off the other's expectations.
- * It is also possible that positive self-emotions may mark inferiority.
- * Some self-emotions may mark one's refusal to be placed or removed from one's place to another.
- * Much research needs to be done in these areas.

Emotions as Place Claims:

- * Emotions may be used interpersonally as place claims.
- * People may actively and intentionally instigate emotions in each other and themselves.
- * They do so to shape definitions of situations and of self: often wanting affirmation of their standing.
- * Actors negotiate their place, trying to move up, reminding and counter-reminding each other of their proper place with "emotion cues."

* Generally, people seem to know that one's expressed emotion is often matched by another's reciprocal experienced emotion. Thus, they may act manipulatively, targeting emotions to elicit specific emotional effects.

* Such emotional cues can evoke the other's place marking emotions to:

- enhance one's power
- put one in another's good graces
- indicate the limits of one's deference
- minimize inequalities.

* Both positive and negative other emotions work this way

* Moreover, an emotional display can be insincere or cynical.

* We tend to ignore the place-claiming function of positive emotions. Yet these:

- imply rules of reciprocity and exchange
- enhance the giver's social worth
- may enable the donor to impose his or her definition of the situation
- may enable the donor to "altercast" the recipient

* To summarize her position thus far, Clark puts forth a series of postulates:

(1) Interaction is often a process of negotiation with each party trying to construct - to arrive at, and at the same time influence - a definition of the situation.

(2) People define situations, that is, construct reality, in order to confirm "who they are" and know how to act.

(3) The definition of the situation includes an assessment of each party's relative standing, or "place."

- (4) People arrive quickly at preliminary judgements of their rank, but place must be continually negotiated.
- (5) In order to define a situation, a person processes a host of verbal and non-verbal cues (that may evoke emotions).
- (6) Some of these cues are “emotion cues,” information about one’s own and the others’ emotions.
- (7) Many emotion-cues relate, often in complex ways, to place.

Emotional Micropolitics:

* Micropolitics involves lines of action designed to get and keep place in face to face interaction.

* People may use their own emotions strategically to elicit emotions in others and to mark and claim place.

* These emotions may be:

- spontaneous reactions to situations, or
- result from conscious/ unconscious moulding, managing and shaping
- skillfully or unskillfully used
- successful or unsuccessful
- evoke counter-strategies

* This extends the idea of emotion management to others’ emotions

* Clark suggests 5 micropolitical strategies and counter-strategies that involve displaying and/or invoking emotions to negotiate/enhance place in interaction.

Strategy 1: Expressing Negative Other-Emotions:

- * A displays disdain, contempt, disgust, hate, exasperation, impatience, anger or doubt towards B.
- * All comment on B's negative attributes - s/he is unworthy, contemptible, disgusting, nasty, stupid, ridiculous, inept, clumsy, etc.
- * We can also include cases where A refuses to honor B's claims to respect, admiration, etc.
- * Such negative strategies work if person A manages to reduce person B's standing, if A raises his, or both.
- * To have an effect, the negative emotion must "reach" its target and have the intended effect.
- * This is reflected in much research on family violence.
- * Clark feels there needs to be more research in this area.

Strategy 2: Expressing Positive Other-Emotions Indicating Own Inferiority or Equality:

- * This strategy involves gaining another's acceptance by displaying respect, admiration, liking, love, and other similar emotions (or by withholding criticism).
- * Apparent sincerity is key.
- * There is surprisingly little empirical research on this strategy.

Strategy 3: Controlling the Balance of Emotional Energy:

- * This strategy involves evoking another's anger, ridicule, or other negative emotions while remaining calmly aloof and bemused (e.g. making the other person look foolish by "losing their cool").
- * The target can be aware of this and refuse to respond as expected (e.g. remain calm, dignified, unflappable).
- * A variant is laughing at oneself first.
- * Cost-benefit questions arise regarding emotion management vs. payoff.
- * One must walk a fine line between displaying and controlling other-targeted emotions.
- * More research needs to be done.

Strategy 4: Eliciting Obligation:

- * Clark proposes that obligation is an emotion or an emotional blend.
- * While culturally we think of obligation as imposition, this obscures its physiological and cognitive push: it can make people want to behave in certain ways toward others.
- * People often remind others of their place by invoking a feeling of obligation (e.g. to kids, spouses, friends, etc.)
- * Altercasting is one technique for reminding people of their obligations.
- * Other tactics, such as "loaning," may also come into play.
- * Although much sociological theory assumes and discusses obligation, we might learn more about this if we attend to its emotional aspects.

Strategy 5: Expressing Positive Other-Emotions Indicating Own Superiority:

- * Expressing positive emotions to others can serve either elevate oneself or reduce the standing of the other (e.g. expressing sympathy to one's boss).
- * Similarly, individuals may be able to cope with fear and anger by turning these into sympathy: the pitied other seems to threaten or to intrude into one's consciousness less.
- * The person on the receiving end may realize what's going on and try to resist the implication.
- * Is it possible that expressing other positive emotions may function in a similar manner?
- * Increasing our understanding of hidden meanings in positive emotions could tell us a great deal not only about this strategy, but also, possibly, about interactions between the strategies.

Summary and Conclusion:

- * Social place is a product of the social structure, the interaction order, the individual's self-concept, and emotions.
- * Emotions mark place in the self and serve to make place claims.
- * We are able to display and elicit emotions to enhance place.
- * The micropolitical strategies that Clark has outlined include expressing negative other-emotions, expressing positive other-emotions, controlling the balance of emotional energy, and eliciting a sense of obligation.
- * Empirical research into the emotional components of hierarchy will no doubt lead to refinements of these formulations in various contexts.

