

Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

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Overheads Class 5-6: The Psychology of Emotions:

Perennial problems in the study of emotions include:

1. How we define the task of the psychology of emotions;
2. How we define an emotion;
3. How we distinguish different emotions and the elicitors of emotion;
4. Defining the boundaries of emotion;
5. The relationship between emotion and motivation;
6. The nature-nurture debate and emotion;
7. The relation between emotion and reason; and
8. The functions of emotion.

1. Defining the Field of Emotion Study:

* Certain phenomena stand out:

- Feelings
- Shifts in the control of behavior and thought
- Involuntary and impulsive behaviors
- The emergence and tenacity of beliefs
- Changes in the individual's relationship with the environment
- Physiological changes not caused by physical conditions.

* Past work:

- (1) A focus on goal directed behavior being "affected"
- (2) The individual's relationship with the environment and other people/ meanings
- (3) Recurrent patterns of behavior accompanying changes in relationship/ appear predictive of future behavior
- (4) Bodily upset/ disorganized behavior and thought.

- * All require explanations from “within” the person.
- * For psychologists, they demand hypotheses about possible causal factors.
- * *Whether taken as feeling or just as some inner state or process, emotion fulfills the function of rendering phenomena intelligible & their consequences more predictable.*
- * Emotions are:
 - (1) Usually are responses to external events
 - (2) Have appreciable consequences
 - (3) Tend to occur in conjunction with each other

2. The Task of the Psychology of Emotion:

- * The task of psychology is to analyze emotions and to *explain them at the level of the individual.*
- * Psychology seeks explanations of emotion in terms of cognitive, motor, and processes, individual capacities, resources, and the like.
- * Psychology of emotions also considers the individual's dynamic interactions with the environment.
- * Psychological explanations are thus composed of three terms:
 - (1) The structure of the individual;
 - (2) Stored information; and
 - (3) Dynamic interaction with the environment.
- * Weighting of these factors is controversial (complex individual structure vs. complex environment). Theorizing seeks optimal balance.

* Different kinds of explanations:

- Intentional aims/subject object relations and meanings
- Functional level (mechanisms/ consequences)
- Structural level (neurophysiological/biological)
- Regularities and laws vs. rules with unspecified restrictions

3. What is “an” Emotion?

* Different analyses at different levels = different answers

- Feeling
- Physiological arousal vs. evaluation/cognition
- Sets of various components vs. one overriding one
- Deterministic vs. probabilistic
- States vs. processes

* Level of conceptualization:

- Intrapersonal vs. interpersonal
- Physiological limits vs. intentional limits

* Defining particular emotions / particular instances:

- Short term or enduring
- Transactions vs. overall relational theme/ appraisal
- Action readiness/ facial expressions/ physical arousal

* Levels selected vary:

- Higher levels ideally complexes of lower
- Not necessarily incompatible/ assumptions key

4. What are Emotions?

* Is a single concept of “emotion” justified?

- Is there sufficient specificity? (e.g. from behavior/ judgments/ activation)
- Is there sufficient functional unity? (e.g. commonalities between)

* There is little agreement on unity and specificity. Some suggestions:

- Pleasure/ pain
- Sensation
- Evaluation
- Cognitive appraisal/ obstructing goals and purposes
- Desire/ action instigation
- Action readiness
- Reactions to stimuli vs. agency

* Focus on process:

- Synchronization of various components/ more coherent
- Restriction vs. expansion of domain (e.g. sentiments similar)
- Ultimate question: not whether an emotion, but which components are present?

5. How are we to Distinguish Different Emotions?

* Various factors posited:

- Physiological components/autonomic response
- States of action readiness/ behavior/ appraisal
- Type of eliciting event
- Core relational theme

* Which components should be preferred? 3 Answers (different + and -):

- (1) One component has causal priority over others;
- (2) Hypothetical dispositions that underlie all components

(3) Unordered collections activated in different combinations

* Contrast with social constructionist view:

- Emotions originate culturally
- Don't consider biological basis
- Does point to an important influence/ emotional regulation

* Multicomponent view:

- Gets away from categories/ static states/ nouns
- Allows change/ processes/ emotions as verbs
- Describes various emotions in terms of processes
- Defines components functionally/ links to appraisal
- Encourages research/ stimulates hypotheses
- Gets away from linear reasoning/ organization
- Considers how subprocesses follow each other

6. What are the Relations between Emotion and Motivation?

* Term "motivation" as problematic as "emotion."

* Motivation:

- Cause, aspect, or consequence of emotion?
- Should distinction be abandoned?
- Dispositions vs. occurrent emotional states
- Does processual view help issue?
- Does every emotion imply motivational change?

7. What Elicits Emotions?

* Types of eliciting factors:

- External events
- Thoughts
- Physiological causes

* Causation approaches:

- Behaviorism: unconditioned and conditioned stimuli
- Contingencies: arrival termination of pleasant/ unpleasant events
- Promotion/ obstruction of subject's concerns/ appraisals

* Meaning/ appraisal approach: problems:

- Evidence for appraisals after the fact
- Hedonistic motivations
- Structure of people's concerns unclear
- Cognitive emotions (e.g. boredom)

* Ultimately, emotions spring from many sources.

8. Nature or Nurture?

* Biologically innate vs. social construction/learning of emotions

* Biological basis:

- Emotional capacities rooted in human constitution (e.g. appraisal)
- Cannot be totally reduced to cognitions/ judgments
- Neurological/neurochemical mechanisms
- Innate dispositions: action readiness/ facial expressions/ language

* Universality does not necessarily prove biological origin (e.g. universal contexts for learning/ universally similar problem solving).

* Biological dispositions/ cultural determinants neither incompatible/ mutually exclusive (e.g. Western and Arab shame)

* Symbolic capacities and social interactions penetrate every phenomenon.

* Not very clear how biological dispositions/ cultural determinants interact

9. Emotion and Reason:

* Traditional contrast of emotion and reason is still with us.

* Mitigated in modern theory:

- Role of cognitions recognized
- Rationality and functional nature of certain emotions
- Emotion often considered appropriate to situation

* Problems still remain:

- Arousal without cognitive antecedent
- Arousal with prepared/ conditioned stimuli
- Inferences not always necessary
- Many cognitions necessary for well-being are unemotional
- Difficulty rationally convincing phobia sufferers otherwise
- Need for emotion regulation/self-control
- Emotions producing suboptimal results (e.g. panic/crush)
- Functions = searching for rationality in irrational
- Dysfunctional outcomes must be dealt with

10. The Functions of Emotions:

* Emotions often viewed today as adaptively useful (biological data/ evolutionary reasoning)

* Two varieties of functional explanations:

- Contingencies that brought into existence
- What they accomplish once in place

* The former cannot be checked now against alternatives

* The latter often = lazy thinking/ obscure other explanations

* While many emotions are functional: there is a problem reconciling their irrationality

- Different types of emotion?
- Limited emotional resources/ inescapable situations?
- Functional reactions applied beyond appropriate contexts?
- Intellectual/ cultural development outrunning evolution?

* The psychology of emotions needs to examine these as well.

Concluding Remarks:

* Problems often not solved due to world views/ limits to conceptualization

* Explanations at different levels not necessarily incompatible

* Need more emphasis on process rather than definition/ at various levels

* Researchers at different levels need to talk/work together more to further our understanding of emotions.