

## Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

Prof. J. S. Kenney

### Overheads Class 6-7: Cultural Differences in Emotions

- \* Focus on similarities and differences in emotional meanings across cultures
- \* New Interdisciplinary Field: Cultural psychology:
- \* Goals:
  - spell out the implicit meanings shaping psychological processes
  - examine the distribution of meanings across ethnic groups/ temporal-spatial regions of the world
  - identify the manner of their social acquisition
  - reassess the principle of psychic unity or uniformity
  - develop a credible theory of psychological diversity or pluralism.
- \* Emphases:
  - how the human mind can be transformed /made functional in a number of different ways (e.g. “One mind, but many mentalities; universalism without uniformity”).
  - a conception of culture that is both symbolic and behavioral
  - contingent acts of meaning rapid, automatic, un-selfconscious: indistinguishable from raw experience
- \* Intellectual agenda: 4 issues:
  1. The generic shape of meaning system distinguishing emotion from other experiences.
  2. How particular emotional meanings constructed in different ethnic groups/ spatial-temporal regions of the world?
  3. To what extent is the experience of various states emotionalized rather than

somatized in different groups?

4. Precisely how are emotionalized and somatized meanings acquired?

\* Today we will look at first two issues

\* Method: examine ancient Sanskrit text on emotion (Rasadhaya) as illustration:

- Compares favorably to contemporary work on emotions
- Hardly known by researchers
- Provides object lesson on the above

### **The Basic Emotions of the Rasadhaya:**

\* 3<sup>rd</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries: Hindu aesthetic philosophers posited the existence of 8 or 9 basic emotions:

- (1) sexual passion, love or delight;
- (2) amusement, laughter, humor or mirth;
- (3) sorrow;
- (4) anger;
- (5) fear or terror;
- (6) perseverance, energy, dynamic energy or heroism;
- (7) disgust or disillusion;
- (8) amusement, wonder, astonishment or amazement.
- (9) serenity or calm (mentioned only by some commentators).

\* Four of these were seen as basic emotions: sexual passion, anger, perseverance and disgust.

\* Dramatic emphasis: the most effective dramatic means of representing the basic emotions in the theatre.

\* *Rasa*: meta-emotion of enjoyment/ form of consciousness elicited by dramatic performance

\* Text differentiates 8-9 various colors or flavors of *rasa* , each related to the basic emotions enumerated above:

- (1) the erotic or love (the *rasa* of sexual passion);
- (2) the comic (amusement);
- (3) the compassionate or pathetic (sorrow);
- (4) the furious or fury (anger);
- (5) the heroic (perseverance);
- (6) the terrifying or terror (fear);
- (7) horror, the loathsome, odious or disgusting (disgust);
- (8) the marvelous, awesome, admiration or wonder (wonder);
- (9) the quietistic or calm (serenity).

\* Relationship between the *rasa* and the basic emotions:

- audience experiences pleasure of performance
- different than the real emotion
- relationship of intentional state to intentional object
- symbolically induced perception of hidden meaning structures
- means of self-consciousness/ transcendence

\* Two basic questions emerge:

- (1) What does text reveal about itself as a specific cultural account of what is “basic” to human emotional experience.
- (2) What can this text tell us about the symbolic structure of emotional experience?

### **The Wonder of the Sanskrit Emotions: A Cultural Account:**

\* Account both familiar and strange to researchers

\* Listings of basic emotions/ facial expressions often compared, with difficulty (e.g. Ekman)

- \* Three emotions on both lists (i.e. anger, fear and sorrow)
  - Not necessarily universals (as linguists show)
- \* Other emotions diverge considerably:
  - Some we wouldn't consider emotions (perseverance)
  - Others have different structures than ours (disgust, amusement)
- \* Primary and secondary division also problematic/unfamiliar
  - Linked to "four worthy goals" in Hindu life
- \* North Americans would conceive of list as anomalous: different meaning structures= different consciousness
- \* Important to understand: *rasa*= union of 3 components:
  1. The determinants, causes or eliciting conditions
  2. The consequences
  3. The accompanying mental states
- \* This is a relatively elaborate account of the symbolic structures that give shape and meaning to a selected subset of mental experiences as emotions

### **The Symbolic Structure of the Emotions:**

- \* Strategy: (1) define a basic emotion by the implicit symbolic structure that gives shape and meaning to that emotion (its *rasa*)
  - (2) define that symbolic structure by resolving it into its determinants, consequences and accompanying side effects.
- \* This is directly parallel to various contemporary approaches

(cognitive/interpretive schemes/slots in story)

\* Emotion consists here of various slots of experience (package deal):

- somatic events
- affective feeling
- perception of antecedent condition
- implications for self
- social judgement
- plan of action/preserve self esteem

\* Emotions can be deconstructed into these narrative slots/used for comparison

\* The issue of translation equivalence becomes a matter of pattern matching - of determining whether the variables in each of these slots are linked in similar ways across cultures.

### **Bite Your Tongue: The Case of Hindu Lajja:**

\* Example of comparative approach: Hindu *Lajja*:

- often translated as “shame,” “embarrassment,” or “modesty”
- each translation is problematic
- deliberately shown/put on display
- seen as virtue/ esp. for women
- upholds social order/role obligations
- rooted in legend of Kali: “Bite your tongue”
- Preserves harmony in patriarchal society/ subdues female rage

\* Deconstruction into narrative slots:

- Doesn't map well onto shame, embarrassment, shyness + modesty
- Not neurosis: virtue promoting self-esteem
- When seen as lacking causes blushing, sweating, etc.
- triggers both familiar and unfamiliar

- not shame, but general habit of respect for hierarchy/ consciousness of responsibilities
  - South Asians and Westerners on shame, happiness and anger (former see shame and happiness together; Westerners happiness and anger)
- \* Something doesn't literally translate here/ perhaps in others attempts as well

### **The Social and Moral Context of Emotional Experience:**

- \* *Lajja* shows dependence of emotional experience on social/ moral context
- \* We must understand the moral goods that members of the culture strive to achieve.
- \* Useful framework: Moralities centered in varying degrees around ethics of:
  - (1) autonomy;
  - (2) community; and
  - (3) divinity
- \* Cultural emphases affect experience/ expression of emotion.
- \* Cultures emphasizing autonomy:
  - Freedom
  - Individual well being
  - Nothing condemned that doesn't harm others
  - Rights, harm and justice
  - Emotions respond to individual gains/losses
  - Other emotions (e.g. relating to duty) relatively downplayed
- \* Cultures emphasizing community:
  - Priority given to collective (family, guild, clan, community)

- Moral goods protect entities from without/within
- Focus on loyalty, duty, honour, respectfulness, self-control
- Individual choices take on moral significance (e.g. clothing)
- Different emotional priorities (e.g. *Lajja*; honour, heroism)

\* Cultures emphasizing divinity:

- Individuals seen as part of God/ body as temple
- Personal choices have spiritual significance (e.g. food and purity)
- Focus on attachments preventing enlightenment.
- Emotions centered on this broader than ours (e.g. disgust; personal accomplishments to purification)
- Emotions to be overcome: evidence of spiritual progress (serenity)

### **Conclusion: The Cultural Psychology of the Emotions Anew:**

\* Interdisciplinary work must focus on deconstructing emotions in various cultures into narrative slots

\* Will avoid misleading strategy of direct translation

\* Will avoid bias that emotional life “basically” the same around world

\* Ultimately: we may be basically alike in some ways, basically different in others.