

Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

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Lecture 14: Michael Hammond: Affective Maximization

Hammond's model is as grand as any in the history of social theory. It postulates that the patterning of social and idea structures in certain ways will increase the likelihood of positive emotional arousal for individuals. Moreover, since such patterning is sensitive to conditions of social scale, the specific social and idea structures that are most likely to emerge vary in a non-random manner. These changes offer a new view of human social evolution.

Hammond's basic argument is that, as a species, we are constructed to seek positive emotional arousal. We are driven to prefer experiences where such arousal can be had. It also leads us to erect certain social and idea structures to facilitate this. These structures differentiate individuals, objects, places, and occasions according to attributes that are hierarchically ranked for their arousal potential. Which attributes are chosen for this differentiation depends on such factors as how much information is required to establish the status of an individual with respect to the attribute (e.g. sex vs. a person's moral character). Social scale and technology also impact here, hindering or encouraging the material embodiment of the kinds of differentiations adopted, along with the time frame that is used to organize social commitment to the differentiation scheme (e.g. this worldly vs. other-worldly temporal differentiation in affective maximization schemes).

Hammond feels that postulating an inborn species need for affective arousal enables us to address a great many questions about social organization and social evolution. He feels that this may have a parallel with how some drugs work by mimicking the structure of naturally occurring chemicals in the brain - unlocking an existing key to arousal in the nervous system. Similarly, certain social and idea structures can mimic patterns of affective arousal and can offer greater guarantees of arousal. With such guarantees, individuals find it most attractive to create these structures.

There are three parts to Hammond's model:

- (1) The general structural pattern that affective attachments are likely to take;
- (2) An analysis of how social differentiation might mimic this pattern;
- (3) An outline of the consequences of this symmetry for the evolution of social differentiation.

Each will be dealt with in turn.

The Basic Pattern of Hierarchical Differentiation:

1. Individuals will seek actions marked by non-distressful, positive arousal. The positive side of

the affective spectrum is a general source of motivation.

2. Except perhaps in early infancy, extensive instinctual guidelines for arousal do not exist. In comparison with other species, instinctual impoverishment marks humanity.
3. Given this, and our extensive cognitive capacities, humans can manipulate their worlds to increase the likelihood of positive arousal.
4. Given the profound physiological attractiveness of positive arousal, individuals will try to shape their worlds, consciously or unconsciously, to evoke a strong pattern of such arousal. Their success depends on their circumstances. Strength of arousal is denoted by the intensity, frequency and security of arousal. Security of arousal is defined in terms of the likelihood of stable, long-term arousal. The pursuit of such a pattern is called "affective maximization."
5. Affective maximization is such a compelling motivational principle that individuals will pursue it even in the face of major negative consequences (but this is not necessarily the same as the pursuit of happiness or hedonistic pleasure, neither of which may be a good maximization strategy).
6. In the quest for affective maximization, individuals will seek affective attachment, recurring affective arousal attributable to individuals, ideas, objects, or whatever. This increases the likelihood of positive arousal by virtue of the continuity of past, present and potential future arousal.
7. Instinctual guidelines to specify attachments do not exist, hence, many potential ties exist.
8. Once an attachment is established, it is not necessarily locked in and unbreakable. Human ties are precarious and must be reinforced if they are to endure.
9. Given their precarious nature, an effective long term strategy of affective maximization would be to create multiple ties, rather than a single tie whose disintegration would be excessively painful.
10. Human physiological capacity for affective arousal is finite. Intense arousal can only be occasional, otherwise physiological debilitation sets in. This limits the number of affective ties at any given time, and further limits those to whom deep bonding is made. This results in uneven attachment: social boundaries that are marked by the unequal allocation of affective weight among both potential and actual ties. This uneven attachment produces differentiation.
11. In the pursuit of affective maximization, hierarchical differentiations that rank-order the desirability of certain affective ties are more efficient than non-hierarchical distinctions.

Altogether, the most efficient maximization strategy for individuals is to pursue multiple, uneven attachments framed by hierarchical differentiation of the attributes of candidates for

affective ties. Deep affective arousal is possible without these structural elements, but is also less secure. Each of these elements adds a non-random aspect to arousal. The more of these elements present, the greater the likelihood of long-term, deep arousal. Assuming a preference for affective maximization, individuals should seek to make use of as many of these structural elements as possible.

Cognitive and Time Constraints:

Two developments are likely to emerge from hierarchical differentiation of affective attachments: (1) the use of information criteria for evaluating attachments; and (2) the embodiment of these differentiation criteria. Both use information limited by individual cognitive capacities and time constraints.

The first factor, information about the attribute of ties is crucial for creating and maintaining unequal attachments. Some, such as sex distinctions, require little information and may be processed quickly. Other types of distinction require much information and time to process, but are appealing as they can be more subtly shaped around the specific characteristics of individuals. Mixing these up increases the number of ties and security.

The second factor is also linked to limited cognitive capacities and time available. Whatever would make for more efficient use of time in the pursuit of arousal would be most appealing. Embodiment aids arousal by providing tangible and/or sensible means by which to experience and express attachment. Embodiments give concrete form to arousal and increase the likelihood of arousal over time by aiding the re-experience of the affective tie.

This suggests the next two steps in Hammond's model:

12. Given individual limitations in time and information processing capacity, individuals will mix-low information and high information ties in the pursuit of affective maximization.

13. Given these same limitations, individuals will seek to embody their ties in order to increase the likelihood of arousal.

Social Differentiation:

The above existential pursuit of affective maximization may be linked to social differentiation. Social differentiation (e.g. on social class) can increase the efficiency of selecting ties for uneven attachment: more ties, or ties with a greater likelihood of long-term arousal, are possible for the same investment of time and energy, and this decreases the precariousness inherent in human bonding. Would we not be disposed to create such social structures if they enhanced the likelihood of positive affective arousal?

14. Given the precariousness of emotional ties to specific individuals, one maximization strategy would be to mix some specific ties with some that are not linked to specific persons. These

broader attachments, such as to gender groups, occupational specializations, ethnic communities or the like, offer a great deal of long-term security of arousal even if some, or all, personal ties are broken.

15. Lacking any inbuilt schemes for selecting ties for affective maximization, people have to choose their attachments on the basis of the information they can collect. However, pre-existing classification systems developed by others may save a great investment of time and energy. Hence, their use is highly likely.

16. Given its value as a preexisting classification for uneven attachment, social differentiation is an almost irresistible framework within which to pursue affective maximization.

17. In pursuit of affective maximization, hierarchical differentiation is more efficient than non-hierarchical differentiation: socially differentiated attributes are likely to be ranked in terms of their desirability.

18. Hierarchical differentiations that are embodied are likely to be more effective in guaranteeing long-term arousal than purely abstract categorizations.

19. Embodiments marked by social inequality (e.g. in prestige, power and wealth) are particularly effective in terms of establishing uneven attachment. This: (a) may be based on resources available for their arousal potential; (b) can reinforce activities that already have affective appeal; (c) can aid the selection of affective attachments by decreasing the number of ties a person is likely to consider; (d) inequality can serve to enhance attachment by providing a link to other affective foci (e.g. friendship); (e) inequality can be a means to an end (e.g. acquiring or forging other affective ties).

Either as a means or an end, inequality can increase the likelihood of secure affective arousal. At least for some part of the population, it can serve as one means to affective maximization. Of course, this is not likely to be the only vehicle used for arousal. Social differentiation is also made across, ethnic, religious or nationalist boundaries, and such shared characteristics provide a homogeneous background against which to frame day to day activities. Such commonalities may be mixed with other hierarchical boundaries - sometimes in comfortable, sometimes in uncomfortable ways, to produce a strategic mix.

Time and Social Differentiation:

The last general aspect of social differentiation related to time. It can become a basis a basis for affective weighting and a means of increasing the likelihood of arousal:

20. Given their greater potential for security of arousal, social differentiations which endure in predictable form are more appealing than those which emerge, change or disappear randomly.

21. In the case of temporal extensions involving change, expected differences between past,

present and future can be hierarchized so that individuals invest in them emotionally (e.g. a framework where the future is expected to be better than the present).

The most likely structure of any social differentiation will be a temporally extended, embodied, and hierarchical rendering.

Social Scale, Differentiation and Inequality:

Social scale, a measure of likely rates of interaction and information exchange in a population, affects whether different frameworks for affective maximization can be maintained over time among more than a few individuals. This indicates problems that individuals may face and the means available to them for affective maximization.

As scale increases, average interaction time decreases, therefore available information about specific others is likely to decrease as well. This is likely to affect the type of social differentiation that is most useful in guiding individual choices for affective maximization. Of course, this relationship is complex, depending on how information is used to establish differentiation criteria, and on the variable costs of the criteria selected. One of these costs is opposition from those who are deprived and disadvantaged - particularly at the larger scales. Opposition is more likely to succeed at smaller scales. If, however, there is massive, irremediable inequality (and large scale elites generally have many more, and better organized resources to control unrest), deprived individuals may shift their affective focus to temporal rather than social differentiation (e.g. hope for a better life in the next world).

Since large-scale social organization emerged relatively late in human development, Hammond argues that the most likely pattern of social differentiation to appear first would have been small scale, have lower amounts of the kinds of inequality with major negative effects, and low-information differentiation would have been effective in uneven attachment. This argument may be summarized in propositional form.

22. In the pursuit of affective maximization, individuals will seek some hierarchically differentiated social ties that are relatively low in information demands.
23. Under conditions of varying social scale, individuals construct social differentiations with interaction and information levels consonant with their own available time and cognitive capacities.
24. Changes in social scale create different levels of interaction and information available for affective attachment. As social scale increases (e.g. with technology and economic development), given the finite capacities of individuals, the average amount of interaction time and detailed information shared by all individuals in a population decreases. This means that it is more probable that political and economic inequality will emerge, since these affective boundaries require on average less information and interaction among members of a population.

These should emerge relatively late historically, given that other forms of hierarchical differentiation such as prestige ladders in terms of age, sex and individual achievement are available to provide guarantees of arousal and attachment in social groups with smaller scale. In small populations with their high personal interaction rates, other forms of differentiation could provide ample opportunity for affective boundary formation.

Criteria For Social Differentiation in Small Scale Societies:

Such criteria would likely require relatively low information, such as age and sex. Kinship and sexual activity would also likely be important - the former as a result of the intense care and interaction necessary to nurture a child (which it is better to build on than seek a new source); the latter as a result of its positive affective arousal. Thirdly, there is the distinction between the sacred and the profane, which makes social boundaries with relatively low negative costs eternal categories with an other-worldly foundation. Finally, there could be status ladders based on personal achievements.

The Consequences of Increasing Scale:

When social scale increases, new problems emerge in securing affective maximization. Average interaction time and the amount of reciprocal information among individuals decline. The likelihood increases that individuals will require more extreme forms of hierarchical differentiation to stake out their affective boundaries. One strategy would be to concentrate affective attention on tangible, material objects requiring less interaction time and information than people. Another strategy would be to turn to economic inequality, either as an affective end in itself, or as a means of acquiring material possessions. Although some arousal could be attained by sharing the increased material production with everyone, given the technological limitations on production, particularly in the early stages, such a distribution would produce weaker boundaries than one where a few receive a lot of economic benefits. Hence, the elites enjoy the unequal concentration of material goods, and other hierarchies are created to counter them. In particular, a hierarchy of temporal differentiation is postulated in which the future is promised to be better for deprived groups than the present. This differentiation of affective maximization anesthetizes the oppressed and insulates the elites from disruption.

The Logic of Industrialization:

As long as technology was limited, other-worldly appeals could flourish. But with technological advancement and more surplus production, temporal differentiation could be more firmly anchored to this world. The relentless flow of "new and improved" goods could make it possible, for example, for many to look forward to the new arousal possibilities that the new goods would provide in the future. It could add further means to assure change and variety within the lifetime of an individual.

With European industrialization and surplus distribution, tremendous affective potential was tapped. Although economic inequality could not be eliminated totally as a form of

hierarchical differentiation in a large scale culture, its relative weight as a form of differentiation would decline in favor of the deep affective appeal of material goods.

Other alternative means of hierarchical differentiation to appear include idea systems such as science - both fueling the production process and offering a highly valued affective framework (i.e. new ideas and discoveries). Similarly, an encountering a series of subcultures offers a variety of new and special emotional experiences, as does the increasing ease of divorce and remarriage. Each of these elements introduce an element of temporal change as a focus for affective weighting.

Finally, to state that there is an affective maximization logic in these many historical changes is not to assert that this somehow guarantees human happiness or fulfillment. In fact, much unhappiness may be produced in unequal, constantly changing societies rushing to acquire the newest and latest. In the eyes of those in earlier cultures, our secure food supply and relative physical security might seem idyllic, but that is not how we focus our energies.

Altogether, industrialization is the latest in a long series of human social creations that try to deal with the problems of affective maximization in the face of growing social scale. It represents the furthest development in what can be understood as the two master trends of social evolution: increasing material embodiment and increasing temporal differentiation in our hierarchies for affective attachment.

A Research Agenda in Affective Maximization:

Hammond feels that research on his model should begin with the gathering of qualitative reconstructions by individuals of the patterns in their affective attachments.

Research could also focus on his prediction that different cultures use different hierarchies to evoke similar affective arousal (physiologically, or through comparing facial expressions).

Third, he feels that research should examine the prediction that within the same culture, different means might be used for the same affective ends (e.g. artistic, scientific or sports endeavors).

Fourth, it would be useful to investigate the physiological markers of the relationship between hierarchical differentiation and affective arousal (e.g. do different hierarchies draw on the same physiological resources? If so, are these resources finite such that as opportunities for arousal increase in some areas, they would be likely to decrease in others?)

Fifth, it would be important to look at age and changes in the hierarchical differentiation of sources of arousal over the course of individuals' lifetimes.

Sixth, the affective maximization model could be utilized to explain how growing

numbers do not just produce technical problems in coordinating large groups, but motivational problems among affectively maximizing individuals with finite cognitive and affective capacities.

Finally, this model invites a review of the research on social patterns marked by both universality and tremendous historical variation (e.g. male-female social differentiation, kin calculation, and incest avoidance). Since direct genetic explanations are ruled out by their variability, the affective maximization model may be helpful in sorting these out (e.g. the male-female distinction as “a readily available low information boundary subdividing a population for uneven attachment.” Its relative impact can vary as social scale and production technology changes). Similar arguments can be made regarding kinship.

Conclusion:

Hammond asserts that the affective maximization model provides a new link between the physiological and the sociological. By focusing analysis on the scale-sensitive qualities of affective arousal, a new macro-theory can be constructed using arousal as a key part of the micro-motivational dynamics of need. This model provides a new perspective on the old question of why individuals can become addicted to certain social and idea structures. Also, by linking micro and macro analysis, it deals with historical change in these structures and demonstrates that they both have the same long-term master trends of increasing material embodiment and temporal differentiation. Certain social and idea structures are not only “good to think,” perhaps they are also “good to feel.”