

## **Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions**

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### **Lecture 23: Emotions and Micro Social Processes I: Theodore Kemper**

In this class, I want to take you further into Theodore Kemper's ideas on emotion. To do so, I thought it best to review a key chapter in his original book - perhaps the first sociological treatment of emotion.

Kemper argues that a very large class of emotions result from real, imagined, or anticipated outcomes in social relationships. To account for emotions that have a social locus, therefore, we have to be able to specify the full range of these relational outcomes.

He thus begins with a dyadic model of relationship - two actors relating to each other on the dimensions of status and power. From the viewpoint of each, there is his own and the other's power; own and other's status. Factoring in a gain, continuation, or loss on either of these dimensions, this results in 12 logically possible relational outcomes for any encounter (\*see chart\*). Any outcome for 1 party may result in a corresponding outcome for the other (e.g. A may gain power and lose status; B may gain power and status, etc.) Since neither actor can both gain and lose power or status at the same time, four changes are the maximum number that can occur as the result of a single real, imagined, or anticipated interaction. Yet, there need not be a single change.

This model's first theoretical benefit is its explanation of mixed emotions: if different emotions follow from changes in different relational channels, simultaneous change in more than 1 automatically produces more than 1 emotion (e.g. feeling both happy and fearful). The outcome of interaction has affected more than 1 of the 4 relational channels.

Kemper argues that the 4 possible relational outcomes are always due to an agent. Either self or other was responsible or in some sense caused the particular set of outcomes. This agency is understood from the perspective of the feeling individual. If s/he believes that s/he was responsible, then this affects his/her emotion regardless of what observers say. If s/he believes the other was the agent, his/her emotion is influenced accordingly even if objective observers assert otherwise. Self may assign or accept responsibility for various outcomes in various combinations related to the various relational channels.

Kemper then expands his framework to include third parties as agents. This party is responsible for outcomes in the A-B relationship caused or brought about by those outside that dyad (e.g. a mistress; someone who favors A over B through nepotism). This 3<sup>rd</sup> party is frequently a concrete individual, but may also be an impersonal force (e.g. "Bureaucracy," "The system," etc.)

In line with his discussion of agency, Kemper notes that different emotions in the various

interactional channels may be directed towards the different parties involved (i.e. self, other and/or 3rd party). This involves attributions of responsibility for changes (such as loss of interest in romantic relationships), and different emotions in relation to the various agents (e.g. sorry for self, angry with the other, jealous of 3<sup>rd</sup> party). When self or other is agent of the outcome, one may have emotions toward self and other. When a 3<sup>rd</sup> party is agent, one may also have emotions directed towards that party. This results in a sevenfold set of possibilities when agency and direction of emotion are considered together.

Summing up his initial postulates, then:

1. Relationships between actors can be characterized by locating the actors relative to each other on the two relational dimensions of power and status;
2. In any interaction episode, up to 4 possible relational changes can occur simultaneously;
3. Relational changes are understood as gain or loss in the power and status positions of the actors vs a vis each other;
4. Continuity of the existing levels of power and status of the actors is also a possible outcome of an interactional episode;
5. When a relational change occurs or when there is continuity, some agent is responsible for the outcome;
6. Agents can be self, other, or 3<sup>rd</sup> party;
7. One can feel different emotions toward self, other, and 3<sup>rd</sup> party (if there is one) as a result of the same relational outcome.

### **A Theory of Emotions:**

While noting that there are many definitions of emotion. Keeping in mind the need for any definition to be adequate for the data it purports to explain, Kemper defines emotion as: *“a relatively short term evaluative response essentially positive or negative in nature involving distinct somatic (and often cognitive) components.”*

This definition essentially argues that emotions are relatively transitory, either gratifying or aversive, contain cognitive appraisals of the stimulus situation or one's somatic state, and may be distinguished from other bodily states (e.g. simple sensory feelings, organic feelings, temperaments, etc.). He does explain his position somewhat regarding the “relatively short term” nature of emotion by distinguishing between “short term emotion” (where, after a short period following the stimulus, the somatic and cognitive aspects die out) and “long term emotion” where these are frequently reactivated, such as in love, or a recurring or continuous stimulus situation such as a disturbing relationship). Kemper prefers to call these long-term emotions

*sentiments.*

Again, Kemper reiterates that a very large class of emotions results from real, imagined, or anticipated outcomes in social relationships. Real outcomes are distinguished from the others in that they are relational events extending backwards from the present, either having actually happened or transmitted as true during socialization. The remainder include relational events that either did not happen in the past, or may not happen in the future.

Kemper proposes that sociological analysis dictates 3 kinds of emotions: (1) *structural*; (2) *anticipatory*; and (3) *consequent*. To explain these, we must begin with a state of relational equilibrium at a certain point in time, or with a certain set of power-status relations following the last encounter between the actors. *Structurally*, each actor is either satisfied or dissatisfied to some degree with his and the other's position in the power/status dimensions. Structural emotions vary according to the specific relational bases for satisfaction or dissatisfaction. *Anticipatory* emotions, in contrast, relate to actors' capacity to plan, hope and vaguely anticipate the future of their relationships resulting from possible future interactions. Finally, *consequent* emotions are those that follow the relational outcomes of an interaction episode, the culmination of a chain that links the structural and anticipatory emotions to the actual results of interaction. Today we will focus largely, though not exclusively, on the structural dimension, as this is what Kemper is best known for.

### **Structural Emotions:**

Structural emotions are broadly positive or negative in tone, but this can be specified further because different relational channels give rise to different emotions. We will first discuss an actor's *own power* and *own status*. The individual may feel content or discontent with one or both of these. Contentment arises as the feeling that power and status are *adequate* in the relationship. Discontent can result from either a feeling of *excess* or *insufficiency* of power and status. These relate to both subjective perceptions and cultural definitions of what is adequate, excessive or inadequate on these two relational dimensions, and cue physiological results. Following the discussion of own power and status, we will move on to consider the structural emotions pertaining to the *power and status of the other* - which can also be evaluated in terms of adequacy, excess and insufficiency.

#### **(1) Own Power:**

As noted above, one's own structural position in the power channel of relationship can be either adequate, excessive or insufficient. When viewed as adequate, it results in the person feeling security, comfort and a sense of ease. Essentially, a sense of having adequate power creates a sense of ability to win in competitive relationships, a workable deterrent, culminating in a general sense of security.

However, when a person senses that s/he has a structural position of *excess* power over the other, s/he may most likely feel a sense of guilt, a sense of somehow having - or potentially - wronging another in relation to some moral value. Of course, an objective observer may disagree

entirely, and some individuals may never feel guilt despite the most wanton uses of power over another (e.g. certain violent criminals, such as sociopaths). Yet, most people are socialized to values that set limits on the use and enjoyment of power over others, and when those limits are overstepped, the emotion one is likely to feel is guilt.

Kemper hypothesizes that when self is seen as the agent of such excess power use, the emotion is introjected and experienced as guilt - and can go so far as “an uncomfortable feeling of regret, remorse, and self-blame which can develop ultimately into a desire for punishment as a means of expiation.” While, of course, we must be mindful of Aesop’s proverb that “ the injuries we do and those we suffer are seldom weighed on the same scale,” the desire for expiation is no mere curiosity. Numerous investigators have found that when research subjects have harmed another subject without justification, they subsequently behaved in an expiatory manner that would lead to an inference that they had experienced guilt (e.g. undergoing extra efforts for the benefit of another, or expressing willingness to suffer punishment). Cultural and religious values play a key role.

However, when the other is seen as responsible for our excess of power, Kemper hypothesizes that the emotion is extrojected in a form of anger and hostility toward the other, even going so far as suggesting megalomania. While extreme coercion is contrary to the moral code of most persons, and usually engenders guilt, if the agent deemed responsible for one’s own use of excessive power is the other, the coercion can somehow be rationalized as retaliation, retribution or deserved assault. This is guilt (and possibly anxiety) turned outward. Certainly there is considerable evidence that victims of excess power are often derogated or blamed (e.g. Lerner’s research on the “just world” assumption, where people rationalize that those who suffer get what they deserve).

Turning to the structural situation where an actor experiences insufficient power, Kemper argues that this gives rise to the emotions of fear and anxiety. A real or imagined deficit of structural power means that the other can likely win when there is a crucial showdown, that one must comply with the wishes of the other when one does not wish to. Since this likely has a history behind it, the recognition of one’s prior insufficiency may be projected into the present and future. This makes the future both uncertain and uninviting, suitable conditions for fear and anxiety.

If the self is perceived of the agent of this situation, this implies that one’s own lack of power is one’s own fault, that a feeling of impending doom is due to one’s own incapacities and insufficiencies to prevent what is coming. It also implies that the other can exercise power at will, and it is the uncertainty of what the other may demand that gives rise to the painful character of this emotion. For example, Myers (1977) found a very high correlation between fear/anxiety and poor power-status relations between individuals and their supervisors at work - particularly in relation to individuals being repeatedly hassled for making mistakes.

When the other is seen as the agent primarily responsible for one’s own insufficiency of structural power, the emotion remains fear/anxiety, but it has a different outcome. Here, these

emotions are extrojected as anger and hostility toward the other, and a desire to destroy the other's power or its basis. Kemper calls this type of fear-anxiety *anarchy-rebelliousness*. For example, when once free behaviors are brought under the control of others, people feel personally thwarted. If there is no alternative, they are subjugated. If there are, there may be rebellion. For example, when the other is in a position of authority (such as a boss or parent) and makes demands on the actor, the resistance engendered is not so much due to the technical adequacy of the request, but to the fact that the other has made a request that violates the actor's sense of self-determination in the circumstance. The person may engage in fantasy conflicts with the other as a result.

This situation of fear/anxiety where the other is agent also may operate in preventative mode to guard against potential power encroachments of others (e.g. motivating our putting up a deterrent). Experimental studies have, in fact, shown that an anticipatory and controlled use of counterpower can make the other desist from using power against you. As with guilt, the extrojection of fear/anxiety turns the emotion into a basis for power exercise against the other.

## **(2) Own Status:**

Since one obtains status in this relational model from the other, and since this conferral involves the voluntary giving of rewards and gratifications, Kemper argues that when one receives status in adequate amounts one should feel happy.

Yet, just as with excess power, a specific emotion is invoked by receiving excess status: shame. When one claims more competence or achievements than is the case, or others mistakenly assume this, and more status is given and accepted than is deserved, the resulting emotion is shame. Shame usually acts as a brake on the overweening desire for more and more benefits from others when one does not deserve them. Norms and standards that guide manners and appropriateness are full of guidelines as to who deserves and gets how much status. Since honor is a grant of status in the first place, one deserves less if once has accepted too much.

Of course, this may take milder variants, such as momentary embarrassment. As well, a significant factor involves public exposure where those who provide the status become aware of the falsity of the status claim.

In ordinary discourse there is often confusion between guilt and shame, and there is some empirical association/ overlap between the two. Nevertheless, on this relational definition, one primarily involves excess power; the other excess status.

When we consider self as the agent of excess status - the situation where an individual believes that s/he is lacking in competence and true grounds for social credit, and that the status has been taken under false pretences - the resulting emotion is introjected and appears as embarrassment-humiliation (the feeling of actual or immanent exposure of one's faults or competence). The following reaction has several possibilities: (1) acceptance of the lower status; (2) withdrawal from interaction; or (3) compensation: the difficult task of attempting to prove

that one is indeed worthy of the previously conferred status. This latter route may be costly, but is not the same as expiation of guilt: one primarily involves causing harm to another through the exercise of power; the other benefitting beyond one's due.

When we consider the other as agent of one's excess status, the emotion is still shame, but extrojected into a form of anger and hostility toward the other. To be continually be exposed to the contrast between what one believes oneself to be and the higher estimate of the other must ultimately put great pressure on oneself to be as good or competent as suggested: the unpaid debt, as it were, keeps growing. The discomfort of this turns into hostility toward the other. Of course, this can result in an even more hostile response when the other suddenly turns on the actor, exposing him or her as a fraud. There emerges a tendency toward hypercriticism and attributions of perfectionism towards the other - which reduces the other's status to the same lowered level of one's own. Such tactical power behavior shows how power and status dimensions can interrelate.

Turning to the situation of insufficient status, Kemper proposes that when voluntarily given benefits and compliance from the other are inadequate, the emotion experienced is depression. Structural insufficiency of status means that one is not receiving from the other enough of the benefits and rewards that one has come to depend on in that relationship (e.g. rejection by a loved one, in all its degrees and variations).

When self is felt to be the agent of this deficit of status, or if one feels that one does not have the capacity or the means to change the situation, depression takes its classic form as despair, apathy or hopelessness. Indeed, studies have shown that hostility will be directed more at self than other.

When responsibility for one's status insufficiency is assigned to the other, the fundamental expression of depression is extrojected in the form of anger and hostility. When we feel ourselves worthy, but the other denies us the status, recognition, or benefits that we deserve, animosity is released against the other. Depression is turned outward.

It is important to recognize the distinction between the anger of anxiety and the anger of depression. The former is primarily rooted in insufficient power; the latter in insufficient status. The objects of the anger are differentiated respectively.

To summarize, 6 structural emotions are outcomes of ongoing relationships when one's own relational channels (own power and status) are the focus of attention: *security* when own power is adequate, and *guilt* and *fear-anxiety*, respectively, when own power is excessive or insufficient; *happiness* when own status is adequate, and *shame* and *depression*, respectively, when there is an excess or insufficiency of status received.

### **(3) Other's Power:**

We now turn to the emotions experienced by self that have their source in the other's

power and status. Kemper suggests that when an actor's own power is adequate, this is generally equivalent to feeling that the other's power is adequate, although this also probably means that the other's power is somehow less than one's own. In this circumstance, this should elicit the same emotion as when one's own power is adequate: security. Similarly, if one feels that the other's power is insufficient, this is equivalent to saying that one's own power is excessive and provoke guilt. Finally, when one feels that one's own power is insufficient, this is structurally equivalent to feeling that the other's power is excessive, and one similarly feels fear-anxiety.

#### **(4) Other's Status:**

The last of these relational channels, other's status, also gives rise to structural emotions felt by self. Kemper proposes that when one gives adequate status to the other, we feel that we are fair, equitable and just, and hence experience a positive affective response of satisfaction or contentment with self - indistinguishable from the feeling of happiness that results from receiving adequate status. Hence, we can attain happiness by giving status to others as well as by receiving it from them.

Conferring excess status on another appears to be an anomaly, since Kemper has defined giving status as voluntary compliance. It may well be a null cell in his typology. However, excess reward conferral does occur, such as in conditions of flattery, or mistakenly inflated conceptions of the other's worthiness. These often result in powerful emotions when we are enlightened (e.g. astonishment, shame and anger).

To accord less status to another than s/he deserves is to deny the other his or her due. This is a form of exercising power - and like all use of power that is excessive, the emotion invoked is guilt. In addition, there may be shame, since the excessive use of power may negate claims to fairness and decency. Thus a combined emotion of guilt-shame is probable when one gives less to another than s/he deserves. Perhaps there may even be fear of retaliation.

When self is seen as the agent - accepting responsibility for the failure to provide the other with the deserved status - the emotions of guilt and shame will be felt in their introjected modes: remorse, regret, and the painful recognition of the distance between one's claimed and deserved status. Whether this leads to expiation or compensation, as in the case of excess power use and excess status, is another question considering that self and other are competing for the same status resources - and the only way to retain enough for oneself may be to deny them to the other.

Where the other is seen as the agent responsible for one's failure to accord them deserved status, we have another instance of the rationalization of guilt and shame: derogation of the other and hypercritical perfectionism will likely appear.

In summary, Kemper proposes that when self considers that the status given to the other is adequate, the structural emotion is happiness; when insufficient status is given, the emotion is a compound of guilt and shame. A true excess of status conferral to the other is possibly a null

cell.

Kemper argues that the intensity of these structural emotions depends on the degree to which the four relational channels are favorable or unfavorable to the actor - either objectively and according to common standards and particular conditions of the relationship, or subjectively, according to a more idiosyncratic interpretation of what is favorable and what is not. Obviously it feels good to receive status; it also feels good to give status to the other, as long as this is in appropriate amounts. In general, too, it is good to have power, as long as one has more of it than the other, since it is a partial guarantee that the rewards one gets will continue to flow from the other and that punishments from the other are deterred. Conversely, when the other has power, especially more than oneself, it doesn't feel so good.

The 12 various alternatives of the structural emotions outlined here are depicted in the following table (\*see chart\*). Since these are the possible structural emotions of a single actor, when all are positive, the person must feel quite content in that relationship. When all are negative, s/he must be quite discontent. Of course, most relationships involve mixed emotions - a combination of adequate, excess and insufficient structural relations - in varying degrees of intensity.

As noted earlier, Kemper points out that in addition to such occurrent, structural emotions, there are anticipatory emotions. These are based on a combination of past (power and status) experience affecting optimism-pessimism, one's estimate of present relational conditions, and some degree of confidence/lack thereof. Taken together the two sentiments give rise to 4 feelings:

- (1) optimism + confidence = serene confidence or happiness/contentment
- (2) optimism + lack of confidence = guarded optimism or anxiety
- (3) pessimism + confidence = grudging optimism or anxiety
- (4) pessimism + lack of confidence = hopelessness or depression.

Within his framework, Kemper has proposed a socialization paradigm for guilt, shame, anxiety and depression as characteristic moods and dispositions. It centers around punishment types: (i) power oriented; (ii) proportionality; and (iii) affection-oriented. This leads to a set of 8 possible outcome hypotheses about how each of the negative emotions above are socialized as a characteristic personality trait, as well as the usual coping response when the negative emotion is activated (e.g. status based punishment proportional to seriousness of act = shame. If punisher is a source of affection, compensation = coping response).

Finally, Kemper's power-status model claims an insight into love relations and the difference between loving and liking. Love relationships include 7 situations where one gives, or is prepared to give, extremely high amounts of status to another (romantic, brotherly, unrequited, parent-infant, etc.), and these vary according to whether one or both confer such status, as well as in relation to the power positions of each actor. Such relationships evolve or devolve in light of power-status dynamics therein. Liking is distinguished from loving on the basis that one's standards may not exactly match, the other gives adequate status and uses very little power.



Kemper conducted an empirical test of the power-status approach (an 8 nation study) to the determination of emotions and found a good fit between the theory and the relational conditions antecedent to the “four primary emotions” (anger, fear, sadness and joy).

Further support for Kemper’s power-status formulation comes from a large number of factor analyses of small-group interactions; ethological analyses of primate behavior; studies of cross-cultural roles and behavior; semantic analysis, studies of interpersonal vectors of personality, and the dimensions of learning theory. He argues that these are perhaps the theoretically optimum dimensions by which any relationship may usefully be seen.

Essentially, then, Kemper feels that this power-status model captures the complexity of emotional response in real life, and at the same time systematically allocates the mix of conflicting emotions to particular relational sources.

However, it must be noted that his social relational model rests on *at least* 3 important assumptions:

1. That its propositions are universal, valid for all social and demographic groups;
2. That social structure (i.e. power/status relations) instead of culture (i.e. norms and expectations) are the prime determinants of what emotion one experiences;
3. That there is truly an important degree of integration between the social, the physiological and the emotions.

If any of these assumptions were empirically refuted, his theory would require major restructuring.