

Sociology 3308: Sociology of Emotions

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Lecture 26: Emotions and Micro Social Processes IV: Candace Clark

Today we will examine the work of Candace Clark. This revolves around two themes: (1) her conceptualization of sympathy; and (2) her discussion of emotional micropolitical strategies. We will deal with each in turn.

Sympathy Biography and Sympathy Margin:

Clark begins by asserting that when people suffer a misfortune, others may either consider them to be "sympathy worthy" or "blame" them for their plight (1987:298). She proposes a theoretical model for distinguishing individuals who receive sympathy from those who are blamed which revolves around the concept of "*sympathy margin*" (i.e. the amount of leeway a given individual has for which s/he can be granted sympathy and not blamed). Describing this concept, Clark writes:

One's moral worth and network ties affect how many emotional commodities, including 'units' of sympathy and compassion, can be claimed from others and that others feel they owe...(This margin) must be *ascribed by others*. Since we all interact with a variety of others, we may speak of people as having many margins of various widths - one with each specific other in one's network...Each group member has...what amounts to an 'account' of 'sympathy credits'...A certain number of sympathy credits are automatically on deposit in each of the sympathy accounts of the ordinary group member, available for cashing in when they are needed. They are a right of group membership (1987:300-1).

Clark notes that those involved in close relationships have an *obligation* to create wider sympathy margins for each other than do mere acquaintances, but notes that anyone who has been *ascribed* margin has the right to sentiment, empathy, and display of sympathy. Nevertheless, sympathy accounts or margins do not remain constant, but are *continually negotiated*. According to Clark, in this process, these may be "increased, decreased, replenished, or used up entirely" (1987:302). A person may cash in the credits built up throughout his or her "sympathy biography" in a difficult situation, but should not drain the account completely. In such cases, the potential sympathizee may not only lose sympathy, but have to look elsewhere.

Indeed, Clark's identifies four rules of 'sympathy etiquette,' which include:

- (1) Don't make false claims to sympathy (e.g. exaggerating claims/ "crying wolf");
- (2) Don't claim too much sympathy (e.g. continually complaining or whining about something);
- (3) claim some sympathy in appropriate circumstances (e.g. don't brush it off as demeaning);
- (4) reciprocate to others for gifts of sympathy (e.g. if you received it from somebody on one

occasion, provide it to them on another when appropriate). (1987: 303-13).

As well, Clark identifies what she calls "deviant sympathizers," who either "underinvest" by not recognizing others' rights to sympathy, or "overinvest" by giving sympathy to others who are not worthy, whose plights are not worthy, or who do not adhere to the rules of sympathy etiquette (1987:313-16).

Clark's theory is clearly relevant to the social responses experienced by victims of crime, as some are treated with sympathy, some not, and the degree of sympathy expressed often varies over time. Indeed, as we noted in the class on emotional deviance, her rules of sympathy etiquette may help explain these variations to some degree.

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

Clark begins by asserting that micropolitics, like all politics, has to do with the creation and negotiation of hierarchy: getting and keeping power, rank, standing, or what she calls "social place." In everyday, face to face encounters and relationships, we constantly monitor the shifting micropolitical balance. We want to know where we stand, relative to others, at a given moment. And we want to have a say in negotiating our standing.

Emotions, by virtue of the fact that they define and alter people's social place, 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:

Clark notes that one of the paradoxes of social existence is that while we share group life together, we are also separated and divided by a variety of hierarchies. Whether based on gender, race, class or something else, we find hierarchies virtually everywhere in social structure and everyday encounters.

In the micro-hierarchy of a given encounter, one person generally has higher place than others, even if all are ostensibly peers or intimates. This gap can vary greatly in degree, from immense to nearly imperceptible. As long as people agree upon a certain distance between them, they may interact freely, frequently, and almost "intimately" without altering the place configuration.

In Clark's view, place is to everyday social interaction what social status is to social structure. While status is a socially agreed upon, macro-level position, place is a less well-

defined, micro-level position such as follower, leader, star, supporting character, or the one who has the upper hand. Place encompasses factors like power, prestige, face to face status, and social distance (or intimacy). Those occupying higher place have more esteem and privilege. They also have more and different interactional rights (e.g. to evaluate others, ask personal questions, give advice, point out flaws, have their opinions count). While macro social statuses affect one's micro place, the relationship is not perfect.

Social actors are often uncertain about both the abstract notion of place, as well as about their own concrete place in a specific encounter. Part of this can be explained by the fact that places are situational, overlapping and changeable. We move among many places during a day, occupying at least one in each of our relationships and encounters. Moreover, when many actors are present we may occupy several social places at once. As well, place configurations are unstable: in an instant the gap between the parties can widen or narrow, or the superior can become inferior.

To add to the complication, 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. Objective placement is not where people wish to stand or think they stand, but the place that others ascribe. It affects the subjective sense of "where I stand in the relationship," but is not altogether determinative.

If, for example, person A feels ordinary and equal but others look up to him as dominant and superior. If the group ask him to solve a problem, he may work hard to warrant their trust and support and an elevated place. Also consider a business meeting where person B puts forth an idea she expects others to follow. Person B could be placing herself highly, and, if the others accept her suggestion, B's subjective and objective place coincide. If, however, the others laugh at or ignore her suggestion - and implicitly refuse her place claim - she can either modify her position of place to agree with the group or reject it and try to elevate herself or lower her colleagues. In the space of a few minutes, objective and subjective place may shift from concordance to discordance and back again.

It seems reasonable to suggest that self-concept affects subjective sense of place and vice versa. We can see subjective place as an impermanent adjunct to self. Self, which is created through interaction, is the sum of all one's thoughts and feelings about oneself, a somewhat enduring understanding of "who I am." Sense of place, in contrast, is momentary consciousness of who I am and how I can act at this moment in this encounter - part of the situated self.

Many sociologists have asked how people "know their place," and traditional answers have focused on combinations of cognitive and behavioral factors: what people assume about their statuses, how they read verbal and nonverbal cues from (and into) others' behavior, the messages they receive from the self-concept, and how they act. Goffman (1951), for example, focused on how class-specific etiquette, vocabulary, dialect, and overall demeanour served as status reminders. Schwartz (1967; 1973) demonstrated that monopolizing others' time by making them wait reflects and reinforces power differences, as do the inherent power messages built into

giving expensive gifts. More recently, expectation-states theory has been applied to issues of face to face status (Ridgeway et.al. 1985). This argues that people's performance expectations for themselves affect the kinds of cues they give, and in turn the outcome of the interaction in terms of status.

While such cues can reflect and reinforce differences in power, prestige and intimacy, these explanations are incomplete. Without attending to emotion, we do not have as full an account as we could about how social actors generate social hierarchy. After all, people constantly experience and elicit emotions in interaction. It seems reasonable to assume that they do something significant.

Emotions and Place:

Clark says that people assemble place configurations with the glue provided by emotions. Constructing a sense of one's relative place involves self-evaluation and comparison, and these activities evoke feelings of shame, pain, and belittlement, or of pleasure, pride and empowerment. Sending a place message can evoke some of these feelings in the other. The 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 (e.g. the student who wanted to go to grad school feeling/acting embarrassed when approaching a professor with her ideas to garner support).

Because of emotions, felt social place can also persist over time and across settings. For example, a student who graduates and becomes the colleague of formerly revered professors may have difficulty shifting to the new place, and they may have difficulty letting him or her do so.

Some emotions are uniquely relevant to issues of place. When objective and subjective place are aligned, emotions such as satisfaction, pride and exultation record this comfortable state. But when they diverge, certain emotions such as anxiety, resentment or indignation record the fact, and, if visible, convey it to the others present. Significantly, such displays of emotion can affect place.

In many ways then, emotions relate people to place: both *intrapersonally* (in place marking) and *interpersonally* (in place claiming). Neither has been systematically studied.

Emotions as Place Markers:

Clark says that emotions relay messages - sometimes physically unmistakable messages - to self about one's place in an encounter (e.g. a boss' withering stare either makes one feel intimidated, hurt or lowered, or resentment marks one's refusal to accept the implied message; adoration by one elevates the other; patronizing assistance lowers the other's status). Social role-making emotions such as humiliation, disgust, shame, gratitude and admiration can serve to let people know their place. Place reminders remind when they evoke emotions.

Place markers can operate in either a consequent manner (as in the example of the boss' intimidation or the person being patronized) or in an anticipatory manner (as in a person awed by the opportunity to meet another). One person might experience any of several emotional combinations.

To date, the most relevant research on emotions as place markers comes from studies of so-called "inferiors" who have submitted to extreme oppression and violence (e.g. political prisoners, minorities, and battered women). One of the most striking findings is that, in the case of some, feelings of inadequacy vis a vis their oppressors led them to feel they deserved a subordinate place. Such phenomena evidence some "identification with the oppressor" in which victims cannot steadfastly cling to positive self-assessments and self-emotions. It is necessary for subordinates in such circumstances not only to get away from the situation, but to restructure their relationship with themselves.

Emotions can serve as place-markers in humiliating situations (e.g. elderly people being humiliated by caregivers and wanting to "sink through the floor" and "die.") Other ways that this can occur is in the numbing of feelings and feeling like a "robot" that occurs with emotional abuse - avoiding (and denying the worth of) natural feelings of anger when it is impossible so that one is enabled to stay in dangerous or unpleasant situations. Since the other's feelings take precedence, one thus becomes emotionally invisible - not only to the other but to oneself as well - and are allocated to a lower place.

Emotional habits may also develop that limit one's emotional repertoire, and, therefore, continually remind humiliated individuals of their lower status (e.g. continually smiling ingratiatingly). Negative self-emotions can also incapacitate role-performance, thus creating the objective conditions for inferior status (e.g. "freezing" when embarrassed or called on in class). Indeed, anyone required to perform before an important audience may develop stagefright - which can turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy (e.g. public speaking, job interviews).

On the other hand, an actor may create fluster and anxiety in others by behaving or presenting him/herself in an unexpected manner, thus throwing off the other's expectations. Similarly, many professional groups or "experts" maintain superiority by using mystifying jargon and insider language, displaying credentials, or deliberately obfuscating straightforward matters.

While we have thus far only considered how negative self-emotions may mark inferior places, it is also possible that positive self-emotions may mark inferiority (e.g. Japanese *amae*: an emotion of delighting or basking in a superior's doting attention or kindness). Some self-emotions may mark one's refusal to be placed or removed from one's place to another. For example, pride and self-righteousness may help people cling stubbornly to preferred positions that others challenge.

We have barely begun to ask, let alone answer, questions about emotions as markers of social place. Much research needs to be done to elaborate the many issues that arise - and the empirical contexts in which they may be seen.

Emotions as Place Claims:

In addition to serving as intrapersonal place markers, emotions may be used interpersonally as place claims. During the course of interaction people may actively and intentionally instigate emotions in each other and themselves. They do so to shape definitions of situations and of self. Often they want affirmation of their standing. Having no place or feeling “out of place” can be more painful even than having an inferior place. Sometimes actors negotiate their place, trying to move (usually up, sometimes down), reminding and counter-reminding each other of their proper place with “emotion cues.”

Generally, people seem to know that one’s extrojected emotion is often matched by the other’s reciprocal introjected emotion (e.g. A’s anger or disgust arouses B’s embarrassment, shame or fear; C’s admiration evokes D’s happiness, liking or pride). Since people often expect emotional gears to mesh in these ways, they may act as if they can successfully predict the effect their own emotions will have on others. That is, people sometimes act manipulatively, targeting emotions at each other to elicit specific emotional effects.

One person’s feelings about another are important interaction cues that can in turn evoke the other’s place marking emotions. These can be used to enhance one’s power, to put one in another’s good graces, to indicate the limits of one’s deference, or to minimize inequalities. Moreover, emotions such as awe, anger, gratitude or sympathy project their own assumptions.

It isn’t just negative other-emotions that can transmit claims to superior standing. Positive other-emotions may do so as well, although they often serve as claims of equality or inferiority (e.g. “I like you” may translate into “I want to be close to you”; “I admire you” may translate into “You are better than I am”). Similarly, touching can be positive, but also demonstrate power. If we add to this that an emotional display can be insincere or cynical, we can see how complex interpretation problems can be.

In general we tend to ignore the place-claiming function of positive emotions. Yet positive emotions - as gifts - imply rules of reciprocity and exchange. This may both enhance the giver’s social worth and obligate the recipient to repay the social debt. It may also enable the donor to impose his or her definition of the situation of what the other wants or needs. This may enable the donor to “altercast” the recipient and claim superior place. If the recipient doesn’t agree, such things can really rankle (e.g. the sociologist’s upset at the psychologist’s statement ‘thanks for helping us out’).

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

* 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.

* People define situations, that is, construct reality, in order to confirm “who they are” and know how to act.

- * The definition of the situation includes an assessment of each party's relative standing, or "place."
- * People arrive quickly at preliminary judgements of their rank, but place must be continually negotiated.
- * In order to define a situation, a person processes a host of verbal and non-verbal cues (that may evoke emotions).
- * Some of these cues are "emotion cues," information about one's own and the others' emotions.
- * 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. Because emotions mark places and make place claims, emotional micropolitics are possible. 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. They may also result from conscious and unconscious moulding, managing and shaping in deep or surface acting or emotion work. People generally know and use a variety of techniques to work on their emotions, but people may work on others' emotions as well. We may express emotions to instigate emotions in others, and, in turn, help resolve (or provoke) questions of relative social place. These are the ploys of emotional micropolitics.

Clark says that she wants to consider micropolitical strategies in detail. She's not suggesting that people are always aware that they're using such strategies, but that they are sometimes aware. Nor does she assume that everyone is equally good at knowing what strategies will work or at carrying them out. But when 2 people do not agree on their relative standing, one person's ploy may carry the day, backfire, evoke a counter-strategy, a power struggle, and so on. Such struggles tend to provoke both emotions and emotion work. One type of evidence indicating the contest is over and how it came out are the resulting emotions.

In what follows, Clark suggests 5 interaction strategies and counter-strategies that involve displaying and/or invoking emotions to negotiate place in contests between two people. People normally use these strategies to enhance place, and often use more than one in the same encounter. We will now discuss each strategy in turn.

Strategy 1: Expressing Negative Other-Emotions:

This strategy is the most obvious, understandable, and the least polite. 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 here cases where A refuses to honor B's claims to respect, admiration and so on.

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 (i.e. B must feel humiliated or somehow lowered, implicitly accepting A's place claim, not reject it and respond in anger). This is reflected in much research on family violence.

Clark feels there needs to be more research on the circumstances in which negative emotion is used, how cultural prohibitions may be overcome, and how these relate to structural categories of people (e.g. do "status shields" enable superiors to vent at subordinates almost at will, or, regardless of status, does expressing negative emotion create its own shield).

She also feels that there needs to be more research on the conditions under which this strategy works, and when it fails (e.g. how do selective interpretation, principles of self-consistency, and emotion-work strategies come in to mediate recipients' responses to such outbursts. Is it possible to develop special skills at combating attacks on self?).

Finally, Clark thinks that there needs to be research on why it is that some people actually handle potentially degrading situations in a kindly and sensitive manner.

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

This positive strategy centers on gaining another's acceptance by displaying respect, admiration, liking, love, and other similar emotions (or by withholding criticism). The emotional and political dimensions of flattering a superior, such as a boss or teacher, is an example.

But when flattery is insincere, its strategic aspect becomes more apparent as "kissing up" or "brown nosing." If the other cooperates by "fishing" for compliments, the flatterer's job is even easier. However, if the other suspects insincerity, the flatterer's credibility may be reduced and the ploy may fail.

Surprisingly, there is very little empirical research on this strategy, and more needs to be done to examine how common and how effective it is, in what contexts, and what costs it imposes in emotion management.

Strategy 3: Controlling the Balance of Emotional Energy:

Besides displaying positive and negative other emotions to enhance place, evoking another's emotions while controlling one's own can also succeed and create "superior" self-emotions. For example, by calmly evoking another's anger, ridicule, or other negative emotions, one can exercise control over the interaction. Making another person "lose their cool" while remaining calmly aloof and amused about the whole thing can result in the other person looking foolish in some situations. Perhaps this is why "getting a rise out of someone," or "getting to

them” is often a strategy for those who are one step down.

Of course, the target of such a strategy may be aware what’s up and refuse to respond as expected. The unflappable, imperturbable person shows him or herself to be truly self-possessed rather than other-possessed. Such an individual also upholds norms of politeness and propriety - which in itself adds to one’s standing.

A more “active” strategy for evoking negative emotions to enhance place occurs among stand-up comedians (and Newfies) who invite others to laugh at their foibles, taking away others’ ability to use strategy 1 by striking first in a culturally acceptable fashion (i.e. “we feel secure enough about ourselves to laugh at ourselves).

Such strategies that involve balancing emotions alert us to the question of cost: what does it cost us to control our emotions relative to the “payoff” of the other “losing their cool” and thereby enhancing our place?

In sum, to be an effective micro-politician one must walk a fine line between displaying and controlling other-targeted emotions. More research needs to be done since we don’t know how people learn where that fine line is, what emotion work they must undertake to walk it, how conscious they are of their active and passive strategies, or which sorts of people are successful in what situations.

Strategy 4: Eliciting Obligation:

Sociologists often use the language of reciprocity to explain the give and take of everyday interaction. One “owes” gifts, emotions, time and energy to others, but we rarely ask why. Clark proposes that obligation is an emotion or an emotional blend. To the extent that we think of obligation as a feeling, we tend to focus on it as imposition.

This way of thinking about obligation obscures its physiological and cognitive push, the sense of urgency, the feeling of wanting to act on moral grounds. Obligation can make people want to behave in certain ways toward others - or toward society as a whole. This is no mere fear of dishonour or reward in pride, but a sincere feeling of responsibility that encourages one to behave.

If our individualistic culture and professional sociology has largely overlooked the emotional content of obligation, people in everyday life have not. Relying on this to enhance their standing, everyday micropoliticians 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 (e.g. “John old friend, can you lend me \$20. No? And you call yourself a friend!”) If John accepts the status as friend, he may accept the emotional obligation the role entails.

Other tactics, such as “loaning,” may also come into play (even though A provides loans to poor farm laborers at outrageous rates, many workers continue to borrow as this obligation ensures them of a job out of the owner’s need to be repaid - making them feel more secure).

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 nicely to establish place - either elevating oneself or, paradoxically, reducing the standing of the other. For example, expressing sympathy to one’s condescending boss for ‘all the work you have to do.’ Such a sympathy donor pointedly points out another’s problem that s/he may not want to admit. If he publicly acknowledges this vulnerability or burden, he moves “one down.”

Similarly, many feel that they were able - in their own minds at least - to change place with bosses, customers or spouses by turning fear and anger into sympathy. Changes in modes of interaction soon followed. The pitied other seems to threaten or to intrude into one’s consciousness less; his or her power to disrupt one’s equilibrium is diminished. Of course, the person on the receiving end may realize what’s going on and try to resist the implication (e.g. this explains how the intended recipients of charity sometimes try to distance themselves to maintain some dignity and independence).

Considering the role of sympathy and gratitude here, is it possible that expressing other positive emotions may function in a similar manner? Can patience, love, and other emotions we think of as marking closeness or equality do so? This is possible, but we also have to remain cognizant of the distinction between sincere niceness, on the one hand, and cynical, ironic, and damn with faint praise varieties. Perhaps by focusing research on people in crisis situations we could get a better handle on the relationship between varieties of positive expressed emotion and changes in place. We could also check on whether insincere sympathy and faint praise are better than none at all. 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 (e.g. does much interaction between unequals involve person A’s use of strategy 5 and person B’s use of strategy 2?).

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. Because emotions function in these ways and because people can do emotion work, 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, and future researchers will uncover still more strategies.

A further issue concerns the degree to which people's placement in various macro and micro hierarchies and subcultures impacts on unique combinations of self-other emotions. Perhaps some will employ certain micropolitical strategies more than others, and even develop emotional realities at odds with what we take to be the mainstream.

It is important that sociologists undertake more systematic study of emotional subcultures and their values, beliefs, rules and place strategies. Clark feels that if we do not begin to compile accounts of emotional subcultures, we run the risk of projecting our own place-conditioned emotions on others - who will remain emotionally invisible.