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[Home](#) > The Sociology of Emotion

The Sociology of Emotion

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The sociology of emotion refers to the theories that attempt to explain the relationship between social roles or norms and emotions. These theories include Kemper Theory, Affect Control Theory and the Hochschild Theory.

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Theories

Kemper Theory

According to David Kemper, emotions are results of the changes in the interpersonal events concerning people's status and power. For instance, person A does not have any love-related emotions towards person B. However, upon knowing that person B is a rich CEO of a department store, person A starts to develop love-related emotions towards him. This theory states that different emotions emerge as the changes in one's own status or power and another person's status or power continuously occur.

Affect Control Theory

Originally proposed by David R. Heise, Affect Control Theory views emotions as transient, subjective and physical states that are based on the present impression of a person facing an emotion-evoking event. This means that emotions serve as "observable signals" to other people regarding the emoting person's recognition of the event, while they act as "visceral

signal” to one’s self. The theory states that social agents design social actions in such a way that they make impressions that are suiting for the sentiments that are dominant in an event.

The Affect Control Theory states that an impression-formation process precedes the emergence of an emotion. For instance, the antagonist kidnaps an innocent child in a drama. The viewer will have a negative impression of the antagonist, which generates emotions of anger (or any other negative emotion) towards the character.

Hochschild Theory

Proposed by Arlie Hocschild, the Hocschild Theory states that the production of displays deemed as acceptable by a society influences the manner by which people manage their emotions and feelings. The standards of one’s cultures and societal ideologies affect how he expresses his emotions and how he attempts to regulate them. In her study involving flight attendants and their emotional labor, she found out that the flight attendants end up with exhibiting insincere, superficial smiles because of the speedy contact between flight attendants and their passengers. The Hochschild Theory was further enhances by Peggy Thoits, who proposed that drugs can also be used by people to manage their emotions. Thoits also noted that other techniques by which a person can direct his emotions include cognitive reclassification of feelings and intentional exhibition of faux facial expressions, gestures and vocal expressions.

Empirical Applications

The sociology of emotions has been applied to various workplace relationships and interactions. Following the study of Hochschild on flight attendants, other scholars that supported the theory such as Robin Leidner and Jennifer Pierce have examined the display of emotions and what influences them in fastfood restaurants, law firms, and many others. On the other hand, the Kemper Theory has been applied to a series of studies on ethnic minorities. Meanwhile, the Affect Control Theory has been put to application in research studies that focused on the relationships between emotions, gender, politics, social structure and the like.

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