**SOC 3120 Social Psychology**

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**Overheads Lecture 17: Understanding and Constructing Social Order II**

Today we continue on with our look at the processes whereby social psychological activities serve to construct social order. Specifically, we will consider:

(1) Talking

(2) Explaining Disorder

(3) Social Problems

(4) Social Movements

**Talking:**

\* Members of a society constitute/ uphold social order by talking about it

(e.g. the universal “cement that binds social order”)

\* This is particularly true of abstract objects (institutions, values & groups)

People experience/ act toward abstract objects mainly by talking about them

\* Talk thrives on problems (e.g. aligning actions, complaints). This gives shape and substance to ideals, values, and conceptions of how things work

\* Talk about problems somewhat culturally and historically variable (e.g. the 50's problem of conformity and today’s narcissistic individualism)

\* Problem talk rooted in blocked conduct:

- before: activities taken for granted

- after: attempts to restore conduct or redefine goals

\* Talk also focuses on the past (e.g. important events/ fond memories)

- helps construct social order (e.g. decade labeling/fitting memories/ordering experiences in line with supposed characteristics)

- not objective: follow plot/ moral narrative

**Explaining Disorder:**

\* People also try to explain disorder (e.g. the nature and causes of a problem**)**

\* Problematic situations:

-seen as disorderly

- fall outside the usual bounds of experience

- can’t be taken for granted/ easily made sense of

- customary stock of knowledge insufficient to role take/make

- aligning actions insufficient to restore routine

- impels search for explanation/ solution

\* Quasi theorizing (e.g. in understanding frequent marital discord)

- identify the cause before the effect

- construct the reality of the latter in terms of the former

- (e.g. building reality around issue of communication problem)

- past history then re-written

- values and beliefs invoked in support

- explanation thus creates reality

- standards of social order given new life through such “solutions”

- reaffirms and preserves cultural objects (e.g. honesty)

**Social Problems:**

\* Talk about disorder not limited to specific encounters: include broader social problems

\* Social problems=collective objects of concern

conditions felt to pertain to society/ important parts of it

believed to be both undesirable and changeable

\* Definitions vary from time to time in attention given and in aspects emphasized.

\* Not characterized by objectivity: while “discovered” by claims makers, many problems existed already, but got little attention

\* The conditions that underlie such problems are shrouded in many layers of social definition:

(1) *Each social condition can be constructed differently* (e.g. teen pregnancy as a moral, educational, occupational, gender, child welfare, or economic problem)

(2) Problem definitions tend to differ and undergo change (e.g. once moral, now gender problem)

(3) Problems tend to come and go in public eye as others gain emphasis

\* Collective conceptions of social problems have 3 important dimensions:

(1)They generally treat some major social object as the core of the problem. Social problems come into play when “claims makers” are successful in promoting a view that a particular social condition is a problem;

(2) Human activity is treated as causally related to the problem. It is not fate, but what people do or unable to do that are seen as crucial.

(3) Social problems definition emphasizes the possibility of human solutions. Since people produce problems, human solutions are considered both necessary and possible.

\* How do these elements of a social problem bear on the view of social order held by the members of society?

- such definitions provide society with potentially unifying objects

-offer a basis for agreement on the nature of the good society

-potential for linking diverse interests, ideas and aspirations

-faith in human effort contributes orderly conception of social reality

-faith that solutions can be found reaffirms human control in uncertain

world

\* However, there is:

-inequality in influencing prevailing conceptions of problems

-the power to influence definitions of social problems often coupled with the pursuit of interests having little to do with the problems themselves.

**Social Movements as Social Order:**

\* A different way of constructing social order is the social movement.

\* Social movements:

- involve a collective effort to bring about some change in society or a

part of society (or resist it).

- seek to restructure society, alter its values, beliefs, practices, and modes of organization

\* While there is an *apparent* relationship of opposition between the social order the movement desires and the social order that exists:

- social movements are intimately tied to the order they seek to alter

- may even be said to be part of the order

\* How:

-shared values (not just different ones)

-using common organizational means to attain their ends -negotiation/ contact with existing social groups and organizations -gaining status as “legitimate” political players

\* In this sense, social movements are an integral part of social structure:

- have become an important part of the decision making process

- remain movements as defining objectives varying from *status quo*

- participate in the coordination of social activities

- presence shapes the social construction of reality

\* In the last few classes, we move on to consider two critical topics in social psychology: deviant behavior and mental disorder.