

COURSE : M.A (SOCIOLOGY)

PAPER CODE : SOCY4106

PAPER TITLE : MODERN SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

SEMESTER : II

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THE 'DOING' OF SOCIAL LIFE

READING : CHAPTER I “ STIGMA AND SOCIAL IDENTITY”

IN ERVING GOFFMAN'S STIGMA : NOTES ON THE
MANAGEMENT OF SPOILED IDENTITY.

THIS READING WILL GIVE YOU AN OVERVIEW OF THE
MANAGEMENT OF SPOILED IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT
OF STIGMA WHICH FOCUSES ON THE WORKING OF
STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICES INHERENT IN OUR
SOCIETY.

Introduction

- ▣ Stigma as a term has its origin in Greek society which refers to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. An attribute of stigma has a discrediting effect, sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap. It constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity.
- ▣ Examples : A criminal, a slave.

Three Types of Stigma

- ▣ Physical deformities.
- ▣ Blemishes of individual character : for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behavior.
- ▣ The tribal stigma which is associated with race, nation, and religion which can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family.

Theory of Stigma

- ▣ By definition, it is believed that the person with a stigma is not quite human. This assumption becomes the basis for various types of discrimination which effectively reduce one's life chances.
- ▣ We often construct a theory of stigma which is based on an ideology to explain the inferiority of stigmatized person. It is also a process of labeling on him/her as a danger posed for others in a society. Sometimes even an animosity is rationalized on the basis of social class. We use specific stigma terms such as cripple, bastard, moron in our everyday language as a source of metaphor and imagery, generally without giving a thought to the original meaning.

Making of stereotypes

- ▣ Members of a social group has a standard of judgment for the process of 'othering' which does not directly apply to them. It always lacks a sense of empathy, and helps in making an stereotype and stigmatizing others who may be different from them.
- ▣ Society determines the identity of a person based on observation, interaction and communication.

Social consequences of Stigma

- ▣ Self stigma : rejection, avoidance, denial, mental disorders, and social isolation.
- ▣ Various types of discriminatory practices.
- ▣ Socio-economic and political exclusion.
- ▣ Humiliation
- ▣ Violence

Coping mechanism

- ▣ In some cases people with stigma can attempt to correct their objective basis of 'failings and shortcomings', as when a physically deformed person undergoes plastic surgery, a blind person eye treatment, an illiterate remedial education, a homosexual psychotherapy.
- ▣ The stigmatized individual can also attempt to correct his condition indirectly by investing private effort to the mastery of those areas of activity which are generally believed to be closed for them because of certain shortcomings on their part. For example, the lame person who learns or re-learns to swim, ride, play tennis, or fly an airplane, or the blind person who becomes expert at skiing and mountain climbing.

Concluding Remarks

- ▣ Need to create a culture of social acceptance for the social inclusion of marginalized and 'stigmatized'.
- ▣ Social empathy.
- ▣ Respect the values of equality and human dignity.

Thank You !