Role Theory

RALPH H. TURNER

Role theory deals with the organization of social behavior at both the individual and the collective levels. Individual behavior in social contexts is organized and acquires meaning in terms of roles. Work responsibilities in organizations are organized into roles, as is participation in groups and in society. Consequently, role theory is one key element in understanding the relationships among the micro-, macro-, and intermediate levels of society. At the individual level the concept of role begins, by analogy to the stage, with two observations: that (1) a given individual may act and even feel quite differently in different situations or positions; and (2) otherwise different individuals may behave quite similarly in similar relationships. At the various collective levels, groups, organizations, and societies function by differentiating sets of tasks, each of which is assigned to or assumed by particular individuals. At both levels, it is important to understand that role refers to a *cluster* of behaviors and attitudes that are thought to belong together, so that an individual is viewed as acting consistently when performing the various components of a single role and inconsistently when failing to do so.

Versions of role theory that begin at the collective level are referred to as *structural* theories. Ralph Linton (1936) defined role as the dynamic aspect of status, contending that every status in society has an attached role and that every role is attached to a status. While Linton defined status as a collection of rights and duties, subsequent usage came to view status as position and role as the expected set of rights and duties. Attempts to enumerate the duties attached to particular statuses soon led Newcomb (1950) and Dahrendorf (1973) and others to distinguish between expected *obligatory* and *optional* behaviors and *forbidden* behaviors for persons occupying specific positions in social structures. Recognizing that some of these structural approaches were overly deterministic and static, Merton (1957) and Gross, Mason, and MacEachern (1958) offered more dynamic theories in which roles are viewed as the foci of often conflicting expectations from the various *alter* roles with which they interact. Merton went so far as to propose that the occupant of a position played a *set* of roles (*role set*), each corresponding to an alter role, and offered a theory of how an occupant reconciled or otherwise dealt with these conflicting expectations. The essential dynamic of all these structural theories

RALPH H. TURNER • Department of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles, California 90095.

is that role players are guided by a set of *expectations* that are either internalized or experienced from external sources, or both, and are judged and judge themselves according to how well they conform to the expectations. An important research question becomes: When and under what circumstances do people comply with what others expect of them (Biddle, 1979)?

In contrast to the various structural theories, *interactional* role theory starts from the patterning of social interaction among individuals and groups of individuals. Most structural theorizing starts with the implicit assumption that the status or position antedates the role and that the role is in some sense imposed on the individual. This assumption is an often useful partial truth when the origins of roles and statuses are not at issue. But interactional theorizing assumes that the patterning of behavior that constitutes roles arises initially and recurrently out of the dynamics of interaction and that statuses and positions arise to place roles in a social organizational framework. This interactional approach involves casting the net wider than most structural approaches do, defining role as a comprehensive pattern for behavior and attitude that is linked to an identity, is socially identified more or less clearly as an entity, and is subject to being played recognizably by different individuals. Four broad types of roles are included in this definition. The most inclusive are *basic roles* (Banton, 1965) such as those associated with gender, age, and social class identities. They are basic, both in the wide range of situations to which they apply and in the ways in which they modify the content and control access to other kinds of roles. *Position* or *status roles* are linked to positions in organizations and formally organized groups. Occupational and family roles are typical examples. Position or status roles, along with basic roles, are the standard fare of structural theories. *Functional group roles* (Benne & Sheats, 1948) are the unformalized behavior patterns that emerge spontaneously as individuals acquire situational identities during sustained interaction in a group setting. They include such roles as "leader," "follower," "counselor," "mediator," and "devils advocate." *Value roles*, like functional group roles, emerge spontaneously but are attached to very positively or negatively valued identities. "Hero," "saint," and "villain" are common examples. Interactionists see the dynamics of functional group roles and value roles as fundamental to understanding more structurally grounded roles.

Interactionist theory attempts to deal with at least four questions that often have been neglected by structural theorists: (1) What are the dynamics of disvalued roles? Under the structuralists' expectation–conformity–social approval formula, it is difficult to understand deviant roles except in the context of a deviant subculture. Is there a formulation that will explain disvalued and valued role dynamics equally well? (2) How can a theory of roles apply equally well to roles that are and are not formalized in organizational structures? (3) How and when do roles change, as we know that even such formalized roles as the police role, the teacher role, and the Christian churches' ministerial role have done in the last century or two? (4) How are we to account for creativity in role-playing, especially creativity that turns out to be appreciated by others?

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Interactionist theory begins by postulating a tendency to create and modify conceptions of self and other roles as a key orienting process in social interaction. While roles viewed as clear sets of identity-related expectations exist only in varying degrees of concreteness and consistency, the critical observation is that people behave *as if* there were roles. Role is a sort of ideal folk conception that constrains people to render any interaction situation into more or less explicit collections of interacting roles. In attempting from time to time to make aspects of

the roles explicit the actor is creating and modifying roles as well as merely bringing them to light; the process is not only role-taking and role-playing, but *role-making* (Turner, 1962).

Even roles in such authoritarian settings as military, police, and corporate organizations turn out, in critical situations, to leave a great deal to individual discretion. Stephen Ambrose's (1997) intimate account of battlefield behavior during World War II documents the prevalence of role-making in even so authoritarian an organization as the army. Police and many other occupational groups have held conferences in more or less vain attempts to specify their roles more concretely. When subjects are asked to describe roles such as those of mother, father, attorney, or teacher, they more often do so in terms of broad goals and sentiments than in terms of very specific behaviors. Mother loves and cares for her child, but just how remains vague or a matter of controversy. Jerald Hage and Charles Powers (1992) point out that there are often alternative designs for particular role relationships: "Many stable configurations are possible. Interestingly, the number of family and work forms has increased rather dramatically in recent years" (p. 114). Only in a stagnant bureaucracy is the functionary who does everything strictly "according to the book" greatly admired. Recognition more often goes to the creative role player.

2. George Herbert Mead's (1934) discussion of "taking the role of the other" identifies another fundamental premise of interactionist role theory. Actors choose their own actions by imagining the roles of those with whom they are interacting. Rather than playing the role mechanically, they shape their own roles so as to interact effectively with the role they attribute to the relevant others. Sometimes this is a matter of conforming to expectations, but more fundamentally it is a matter of collaboration, opposition, or any of many other possible relationships. This interrelationship goes beyond simply acting in response to the other's actions or expected actions, because roles are patterned clusters of actions. Taking the role of the other involves understanding a cluster of actions into which any given action fits and which supplies a basis for assigning meaning to the action in question.

3. Most social roles exist in pairs or sets. There could be no teacher role without a student role, no leader role without a follower role. Social roles that are not part of a pair or set involve interaction with other incumbents of the same role. For example, the role of friend presumes a friend to interact with. Thus roles are linked through distinctive *role relationships*.

4. Role-taking presumes some prior familiarity with the role of the relevant other. This understanding may come partially out of projection, i.e., imagining what I would do if I were in the other's position. But it requires some learning of a more generalized role conception. Such generalized role conceptions may be specified organizationally, conveyed in the culture, and formed from accumulated past experience.

5. The prevalence of role-making is balanced by a tendency for the broad outline of roles and sometimes quite specific role elements to become normative. This tendency has at least two roots. First, because of the linkage of roles through role relationships, changes in a focal role threaten the stability of relationships and force some change in relevant alter roles. The general principle is that when alter's behavior is dependent on a particular pattern of behavior in the focal role, alter will feel that the focal role incumbent is obligated to continue the relevant behavior. Second, a basic level of predictability is essential for social relationships to continue in any group, organization, community, or society. Abrupt or radical changes in roles undermine predictability and provoke anxiety. Hence there is a general tendency to assume that established role structures constitute the framework within which social life ought to be carried on. This observation does not mean that gradual change is not common, nor that abrupt and radical role change cannot be forced on a populace. But it does mean that many people will continue to view such changes as morally or ethically wrong.

ROLE DIFFERENTIATION

An interactional theory, which assumes that roles are continuously being remade in relation to relevant other roles, must begin by identifying the bases on which roles are differentiated. The tendency for actions and sentiments to be differentiated into roles is the most fundamental observation underlying role theory and should be the foundation on which any theory is built. Differentiation means sorting out and separating different actions and sentiments and combining them into separate roles. Differentiation also means the *accretion* of behaviors and sentiments as they are added to particular roles. I will suggest three principles that explain the manner in which differentiation into roles takes place. I call these principles *functionality, representationality,* and *tenability*. Their relative importance will vary from role to role and setting to setting (Turner & Colomy, 1988).

Functionality

The functional principle is clearest when roles are understood as a division of labor by which some collaborative goal is to be achieved. Tasks are initially divided up so that everybody is not trying to do everything. A baseball team without players assigned to individual positions would be chaotic. But there are more and less effective and efficient ways to divide up tasks. The division of responsibilities between, for example, shortstop and second baseman often has been tested and adjusted for greater effectiveness. Over the years, football teams have reorganized players' roles so as to win more games. There are three chief bases for making role differentiation functional, namely (1) differentiation by associated skills, knowledge, and dispositions; (2) differentiation according to the diversity of actual or potential incumbent characteristics; and (3) differentiation to minimize incompatibility of goals and means.

The simplest and most rational basis for clustering activities into particular roles is the *association principle*. It is obvious that there should be differentiated physician and attorney roles because the same underlying knowledge of the human body is necessary for a variety of medical tasks and a fundamental understanding of law is needed for a variety of legal tasks. As the underlying body of knowledge and skills grows, further differentiation is functional, so the physician role becomes differentiated into orthopedists, rheumatologists, and other specialists. Then the orthopedist role breaks down into spinal specialists, foot and ankle specialists, and more. Likewise, the differentiation between physician and patient and between attorney and client assumes a different level of specialized knowledge and a distinction between giving and receiving orientations.

The association of activities also may be based on location. Traditional differentiation between husband and wife roles may have been substantially based on grouping activities performed in and near the home as the wife role and activities performed away from home as the husband role.

The second *principle of functional differentiation* takes account of the variability in the talents and dispositions of potential recruits to the role system. If the population varies in levels of literacy, relevant roles are likely to be differentiated according to the level of literacy expected or required of role incumbents. If the population varies in such personal dispositions as aggressiveness and submissiveness, coarseness and gentleness, insensitivity and empathy, the clustering of activities by roles will tend to take account of these dispositions.

In considering functional role differentiation according to variable talents and disposi-

tions it is important not to fall into the trap of assuming an Adam Smith form of "invisible hand" at work. Keeping in mind the tentative and testing nature of social interaction, we may safely assume that human intelligence often will recognize or discover more effective ways to utilize the diversity of talents and resources among potential role incumbents, and that the more effective differentiations will become customary and transmitted in the relevant culture. But there are two important limitations to role differentiation on this basis. First, differentiation is primarily based on what interaction participants believe are the talents and resources of different categories of people, which are not often reality tested. During World War II when it was necessary to assign unprecedented leadership responsibilities to young military and naval officers and equally unprecedented factory jobs to women, it often was noted with surprise how satisfactorily young officers and women mechanics could perform their roles. Second, existing patterns of role differentiation often create or perpetuate the putative differences in talents and resources on which functional differentiation is based. This observation applies especially to basic roles such as gender, age, race, and ethnicity. For example, beliefs about the limited capacity of women to master mechanical tasks were reflected in early school socialization patterns that provided woodshop courses only for boys and cooking classes only for girls. Since the more formally institutionalized position roles typically involve preliminary stages of selection and role socialization, assumptions about differential capabilities are typically made real by differential role allocation.

To be functional, the clustering of goals, activities, and sentiments to form a role must maximize mutually reinforcing elements and minimize contradictory effects. If two different activities contribute to the same goal, they are candidates for inclusion in a single role. If two activities have opposite effects, they are likely to be split off into separate roles. The latter observation finds formal legal recognition in the *conflict of interest principle*. In order to avoid conflict of interest, the roles of judge and prosecutor must be sharply separated, as must referee and coach in sporting events and advocate and mediator or arbitrator in labor disputes.

The most important contribution toward understanding nonobvious functional role differentiation comes from studies of emerging functional group roles. Bales (1953) and Bales and Slater (1955) advanced the hypothesis that, in task-oriented groups, two distinct leadership roles will emerge. A task or instrumental leader assumes principal responsibility for seeing that group tasks are performed and that goals are reached. The task leader has to override conflicting ideas about how to achieve goals and must pressure group members to concentrate on group goals. In doing so, the task leader is likely to ruffle some feathers and stir up antagonisms that, if they become serious enough, could undermine the leader's efforts. As a result there often emerges an expressive or social–emotional leader role. The expressive leader works gently to soothe hurt feelings and resolve interpersonal hostilities in the group so that members can concentrate more effectively on group goals. Task leaders are unlikely to be able to incorporate these expressive functions into their role because they are seen as insensitive in their pursuit of group goals. While this hypothesis arose out of laboratory studies of small task-oriented group interaction, the principle extends to leadership roles in many large formal organizations. The CEO role is task leader and a personnel officer, industrial relations officer, or other high-level functionary is responsible for uncovering and dealing with employee dissatisfactions. Often in universities the teaching assistant (TA) role incorporates expressive leadership, since students are more willing to express anxieties and dissatisfactions about a course to the TA than to the professor (as task leader).

The hypothesis of task and expressive role differentiation has been offered as an explanation for traditional differentiation between father and mother roles and extended to the more basic gender role differentiation. However, cultural change and widespread cultural and

individual differences have called the explanatory value of this hypothesis in relation to gender roles into question.

Further research into emerging leadership roles in small groups produced an important qualification to the leadership role differentiation hypothesis. Later experimental work with small task groups revealed that in many instances a single leader was able to perform both leadership functions. When cases were compared, it turned out that the differentiation of leadership roles occurred most often when group members had only a weak commitment to group goals. When there was strong member commitment to group goals there was little if any need for a separate expressive leader. Hence the limited utility of this theory for explaining family roles and roles in many voluntary groups (Burke, 1968).

There are more broadly applicable limitations to functional differentiation to minimize conflicting effects. First, conflict of interest is much in the eye of the beholder, so that there is wide cultural variation in what is viewed as a conflict of interest. For example, in many societies there is no felt need to separate prosecutor and judge roles. Similarly, in contemporary Western societies the combination of these two functions in the parent role is not seen as a conflict of interest. Second, in a highly stratified society or organization, conflict of interest is unlikely to become an issue so long as it chiefly affects the rights of subordinate classes.

Representationality

William F. Whyte (1955), in his pioneering and classic study of Boston's "street corner boys," reports that at election time the boys stuffed ballot boxes and in other illegal ways tried to influence the outcome of balloting. Seeking to maintain his rapport with the group, Whyte joined in some of these activities. But he found that the "boys" were surprised and even disconcerted by his participation. Whyte then realized that in his role as a trusted observer of the "boys," he need not have participated in their illegal behavior. Here was a pattern of understood and accepted role differentiation based not on functionality but on what the roles represented. The point is that a role may incorporate an image and the components of the role are selected for consistency with that image.

The clearest examples of representational differentiation are value roles. A paraphrased dictionary definition of "hero" is a person of distinguished courage or ability, admired for brave deeds. But there is much more than bravery and ability to being a hero. As many people fitting this definition have learned, much is expected of a hero. In the United States the hero is expected to accept and appreciate public adulation, do good deeds to reflect a heroic disposition, and display great wisdom in realms unrelated to the initial heroic act. The putative hero who shuns public adulation or eschews good deeds quickly loses the heroic identity, as some astronauts and sports stars have learned. The point, again, is that a conception of the role of hero is conveyed in the culture. The hero role is differentiated out in terms of an image: what the hero represents.

Deviant roles are similarly differentiated so as to concentrate negatively valued characteristics. The murderer, the thief, the rapist are imagined also to be unfriendly neighbors and unfaithful husbands and parents. Encounter with a known murderer who appears to be a "nice person" is likely to be disorienting; how, indeed, does one engage in small talk at a Boy Scouts parents meeting with a father who was recently reported in blazing headlines as having attempted to kill his wife and mother-in-law? One may view these images as merely stereotypes, but as role conceptions they make it difficult for the deviant to participate normally in a range of social settings.

While some roles appear to be differentiated primarily on representational grounds, it is far more common that roles that are basically differentiated functionally acquire an overlay of representationality. The young husband, while hanging out washing to dry, who calls out to his (male) neighbor, "I'm doing it but I don't believe in it!" expresses a representational aspect of a traditional husband role. The differentiation of work roles between head and hand work, clean and dirty work, dignified and menial work, light and heavy work, or sacred and profane work is as much or more representational than functional.

It is a plausible hypothesis that representationally differentiated roles are more resistant to change than functionally differentiated roles. Although the fact that change in any functionally differentiated role requires complementary changes in relevant alter roles is a source of resistance to change, constructive adaptation to conditions under which roles are played surely will win out when functional considerations are paramount. But the way in which a role is viewed both from outside and by role incumbents is usually quite slow to change. As a result, a functionally differentiated role that has been heavily overlayed with representationality may become quite dysfunctional yet still endure with little change.

Several conditions contribute to the overlaying of functionally differentiated roles with representational elements. The need to find concrete embodiment of both strongly positive and strongly negative values in human behavior is the most widely applicable basis for representational differentiation, whether as functional role overlay or as the primary basis for role differentiation. To the religious person, the minister or pastor role can be an inspiration to godly behavior. What the President of the United States represents as a public symbol was paramount in the impeachment trial of President Clinton in 1998.

When role incumbents have been recruited from distinctive populations, the role conception tends to become imbued with an imagery that reflects the way the relevant population is viewed. Popular conceptions of the role of farm worker in the US Southwest are inextricably merged with local stereotypes of Mexicans, as were the cotton-picker role and stereotypes of blacks in the old South.

Roles tend to acquire representational overlays when closely associated alter roles are strongly representational. Lawyers' roles are differentiated according to the evaluation of their clientele, so that lawyers who handle petty criminal cases have less prestige and fewer privileges than corporation lawyers. It is accepted as natural that the university professor is paid more and has greater freedom than the elementary school teacher, at least partly because of whom they teach. When particular roles come into a protracted relationship of conflict or competition that becomes of concern to the larger community, there also is a tendency to enhance their differences representationally.

Representational differentiation also occurs when *role interchangeability* is marked. Interchangeability refers to the fact that the same behavior enacted as part of different roles can have quite different meanings. Giving advice can be part of a helping role or of a domineering role. The very similarity of behavior in two roles to which the appropriate response is quite different calls for a pattern of imagery that makes them seem more different than they are (Turner & Shosid, 1976).

Tenability

In speaking of functionality and representationality we are addressing primarily the relationship between a focal role and relevant alter roles. But regardless of how functional a role might be or how clear and even admirable the image it projects, a role must have incum-

bents who are able and willing to play it. Tenability is a matter of the balance and nature of benefits and costs to the role incumbent, always in relationship to viable alternatives. Tenability contributes to the character of a role through tendencies to add or enhance benefits and to minimize or offset costs. To understand tenability we must distinguish between consensually and nonconsensually valued benefits and costs. Pain and suffering are illustrative of consensual costs, while a good income, prestige, and respect are consensual benefits that may come with a role. But even with these examples, the relative importance and threshold levels will vary by individuals and by groups of individuals, so they are not perfectly consensual.

When rewards and costs of a role are consensually valued, a *power principle* and a *compensatory accretion principle* govern the pattern of tenability-based role differentiation. The power principle is simply that individuals and groups with more power are able to construct roles with a more favorable balance of benefits and costs than are the less powerful. Once again, this principle underlines the significance of the population from which role incumbents are drawn. The articulation with a system of social stratification works in both directions: Roles that recruit from lower social strata have fewer benefits to balance higher costs, because role incumbents have few alternatives; reciprocally, roles with a relatively unfavorable balance of benefits to costs can only recruit from disadvantaged populations. While in some versions of exchange theory there should be an almost automatic balancing of benefits and costs, the observed tendency is for roles to accumulate a disproportionate range of benefits or of costs, depending on the population from which the role recruits incumbents.

Compensatory accretion works in part to offset an unfavorable balance of benefits to costs. When lack of alternatives locks incumbents into a disadvantageous role, they often devise ways to enhance their control and seek to cultivate potential but normally unappreciated gratifications in the role. For example, part of the lore of the naval enlisted personnel is an accumulation of folk wisdom about how to get favors from officers and how to avoid compliance with their orders or escape punishment after noncompliance. It is well known that slaves often have understood their masters better than masters understood slaves and have used this understanding to improve their role benefits-to-cost ratio. There may be truth in the popular belief in "women's intuition," as learned and transmitted skills enabling women in their traditionally subordinate positions to offset to some degree the unequal power men exercised over them by understanding men better than they are understood and by transmitting their understanding to their daughters.

Among the socially most important role benefits are *prestige* and *esteem*. Kingsley Davis (1949) distinguished between the prestige that is derived from mere incumbency in a highly respected role and esteem based on the adequacy with which the role is performed. One may have considerable prestige as a physician, a corporation CEO, or even a university professor, but be accorded little esteem as a "quack doctor," Dilbert's boss, or a dull teacher. In some situations there is a balancing of prestige and esteem, so that a superior carpenter or creative electrician may win more respect than a doctor whose medical knowledge and skills are out of date. Emphasis on esteem is an important compensatory benefit that is often savored and exploited in low-ranking roles, as when the legendary John Henry becomes a folk hero and role model.

Role-incumbent populations often differ in their evaluation of particular benefits and costs. The difference may be so great that what is a benefit to one population may be a cost to another and vice versa. Risk, for example, may be a cost to most elderly, while it is often a benefit to young people. The governing principle of tenability in case of nonconsensually valued benefits and costs is the *fit* between role and personal dispositions. In most instances this means the extent to which a role affords opportunities for incumbents to affirm or enhance

their self-conceptions, though it can also be a matter of talent, ability, and resources needed in order to play a role successfully.

The relationship between role and self-conception is reciprocal. On the one hand, social roles provide the principal organizing framework for the self-conception. In spite of what others might regard as excessive costs, incumbents whose work roles constitute careers may find identification with the career a sufficient offsetting benefit, bolstered by an enhancing career mythology. But lower status or ephemeral work roles may provide little anchorage for the self-conception, in which case more consensual assessments of benefits and costs are usually paramount.

On the other hand, when social structural and other conditions foster role–person merger (Turner, 1978; and below), any discrepancies between role and self-conception cause a strain to reconstruct roles into fuller congruity with self-conceptions. In lowly occupations there often have been organized movements to identify the occupations as professions or take on responsibilities ordinarily assigned to a role accorded higher status.

It is clear from this discussion that there is a close relationship between tenability and representational aspects of role differentiation, especially when role–person merger is high. With regard to consensually valued benefits and costs, high self-esteem and status conscious-ness motivate people to seek identification with prestigious representations, while those with low self-esteem more readily settle for less prestigious roles. With respect to nonconsensually valued benefits and costs, such self-conceived qualities as toughness or gentleness or intellec-tuality or nurturance dispose people to choose congruently representational roles for strongest identification.

Similarly, tenability is related to functionality. For most people, and especially for those whose self-conceptions emphasize personal effectiveness, high functionality makes a role more tenable. In teaching, for example, evidence that students are learning becomes an important role benefit, while negative evidence becomes a cost. These are but limited illustra-tions of the complex interrelationships among functionality, representationality, and tenability in the shaping of roles by redifferentiation and accretion.

It is important to note that these three processes work both idiosyncratically, as each individual engages in personal role-making and collectively as groups or populations of recruits and potential recruits combine forces to create and recreate culturally based role conceptions.

Role Persistence

There is a tendency for role structures, once more or less stabilized, to persist in spite of changes in the actors who play the roles. This tendency arises out of the complementary nature of the roles in any group or organization. If a fairly stable pattern of interaction or division of labor has developed in which each role has a recognized set of functions, the group comes to depend on having someone perform each role's functions. Less modification of the relevant alters' roles is required if the same role is refilled than if the functions were absorbed somehow into other roles. A polarized group may need someone to play a mediator role; any group may come to depend on a jokester role to lessen potentially disruptive tensions.

Role persistence is also observed in cases where *role appropriation* occurs. Perry, Silber, and Block (1956) applied this term in their study of family responses to disaster. In some instances, when a parent became disorganized and assumed a childlike role of dependency, a child suddenly blossomed into responsibility and took over the responsible parent role.

ROLE ALLOCATION

Complementary to role differentiation is *role allocation*: the attachment of individuals and categories of individuals to particular roles. In Linton's (1936) structural role formulation, he emphasized a distinction between *ascribed* and *achieved* statuses. The individual has no choice with respect to ascribed statuses such as male or female, white or black, youth or elder, and occupation in caste societies, and is expected to play the roles appropriate to these statuses. Achieved statuses in more modern societies, such as occupations, must in some way be chosen and earned by potential incumbents. Linton and others have noted that in most of the world's societies, throughout most of history, most statuses with their attached roles have been ascribed. Only in recent history and in more developed societies has a vast range of statuses and roles been open to achievement.

While acknowledging the usefulness of the ascription–achievement distinction, inter-actionists understand role allocation as more often a process of negotiation between potential role incumbents and relevant alters. Allocation processes work from two directions, with the potential incumbent choosing and working toward a particular role allocation, while relevant others affirm or impede the choice and often seek to assign the individual to a particular role. In the case of functional group roles and value roles in particular, behavior intended as perfor-mance of one role may be interpreted by others so as to cast the individual into quite a different role than intended. For example, the would-be group leader can be cast by associates into the role of disrupter and the would-be helper can be cast into a domineering role (Turner & Shosid, 1976). Weinstein and Deutschburger (1963) have suggested a concept of *altercasting* to identify a process whereby the incumbent of one role attempts to play his or her role in such a way as to force alter into a particular role that may not be of the latter's choosing.

When strangers interact there is an initial, sometimes frantic, mutual effort at role allocation. Until this is accomplished, the meanings of all but the most trivial and conventional exchanges are difficult to interpret. The comment, "I don't know what to make of him!" expresses the frustration of unsuccessful efforts at role allocation. Role allocation is not fully accomplished until relevant alters interact with the focal person on the basis of the same role that he or she is performing.

We have observed earlier that role structures tend to persist. Similarly, role allocations tend to become stable and often difficult to change. In a discussion group someone may be allocated the role of intellectual and will then be called on to clarify difficult issues whenever they arise. Someone who has been allocated the mediator role will be expected to start the reconciliation process whenever dispute becomes intense. Someone who has been allocated a troublemaker role will find even constructive remarks and actions misinterpreted as efforts to cause trouble.

The same principles of functionality, representationality, and tenability that govern differentiation help to explain how role allocation occurs. The role incumbent must be able to perform the role adequately (functionality). The image, however stereotyped, of an individual or category of individuals must be consistent with the representational image of the role. As always, the more powerful or otherwise favored individuals and populations achieve the most desirable roles (tenability).

ROLES IN ORGANIZATIONS

Placement of a role in an organization supplies direction and constraint to the principles and processes of role differentiation and allocation and brings them into more complex relationships. We are now talking about position or status roles, each of which is linked to a

defined position. Because organizations have goals and the component roles exist for the benefit of the organization, all role processes must contribute, directly or indirectly, toward organizational aims.

Because organizational goals are paramount and because of the complex division of labor in large organizations, role prescriptions are more normative than in less formalized relationships. Individuals typically have less discretion in the execution of their roles. The special function of defining roles becomes important and is either explicitly a part of certain management roles or becomes a role in itself. *Legitimate role definers*, often far removed from those who play the targeted roles and their immediate alters, specify what role incumbents are and are not to do and the criteria by which role adequacy is to be evaluated. While this formalization of roles makes individual actors predictable and facilitates the organization's work, it also limits creativity and often prevents or delays needed changes in the way the organization functions.

Working Roles

There always are discrepancies between role conceptions and role behavior. When these discrepancies are widespread, the role conceptions may change to correspond more closely to customary performance of the role. Such discrepancies are particularly prevalent with respect to organizational roles because of the formalization, the separation between role definers and role incumbents, and the organizational rigidity that resists prompt adaptive change. As a result, role incumbents typically develop what might be called an informal or working role that differs significantly from the formal role. The working role is not an example of individual deviance. It is a set of shared understandings among role incumbents about how the role is to be performed that differ in important respects from the formal role specification. When workers and their employers are in a markedly antagonistic relationship, the informal role is often developed so as to subvert the aims or regulations built into the formal role. Early studies of informal organizational structures documented informal worker alliances to restrict factory output (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1947). Opportunities to enhance role tenability also can lead to a working role that fosters corruption. Barker (1977, p. 364) writes:

> The police occupation per se provides its members with numerous opportunities for corrupt acts and other forms of deviance. In some police departments there is a social setting where this inherent occupational structure is combined with peer group support and tolerance for certain patterns of corruption. The peer group indoctrinates and socializes the rookie into patterns of acceptable corrupt activities, sanctions deviations outside these boundaries, and sanctions officers who do not engage in any corrupt acts.

More recent exposure of scandal in the Los Angeles Police Department reveals that such antiorganizational worker roles still are not uncommon.

In contrast to these antiorganizational examples, as Edward Gross (1953) showed, informal structures probably more often facilitate organizational aims. The working role typically enhances the functionality, representationality, and tenability of a role when the formal role definition is deficient in these respects. Functionally, formal roles are incomplete and vague with respect to details of role performance and they fail to take account of changes in significant alter roles. For example, formal definitions of the physician's role leave vague the criteria by which a physician decides to allow a terminally ill patient to die. Similarly, the formal rules that define the policeman's role often provide imprecise guidance in individual situations. The individual physician or police officer is then likely to look to peers for a consensus on how to proceed. Role incumbents often find better ways to perform their responsibilities than those specified in the formal role and are quicker to recognize and by

general agreement adapt to change in the execution of relevant alter roles. In the late 1960s, for example, police found little guidance in their formal roles for dealing with a citizenry increasingly losing respect for police and disposed to confront rather than to cooperate with them. Police had to turn to their fellow officers to develop informal guidelines for dealing with these newly developing situations.

Legitimate role definers are likely to overlook entirely the representational aspect of a role. It then falls to the incumbents to incorporate into the working role elements that project a clearer image of the role.

Perhaps the most important contributions to a working role come from the tenability deficiencies in most formal role definitions. Manuals and organizational charts seldom address the sensitive relationships between the role and those who will play it. For roles performed under critical supervisory evaluation, the problem for the incumbent is to have a clear sense of what is expected and of how well he or she is doing. When the formal role is vague, role incumbents typically develop informally shared ideas of what they should be doing on an hour-by-hour and day-by-day basis and criteria for deciding when they have done their jobs. For example, a police lieutenant in charge of traffic officers in a large city commented that officers shared the belief that they were expected to give a certain number of traffic tickets on a regular basis, though there was no departmental policy to that effect. The official dictum that they would be judged by their success in reducing automobile accidents within their jurisdictions, regardless of whether they gave any citations or not, left the role too vague and the attainability of the goal too uncertain. By agreeing among their fellows on what constituted a good day's work and making their duties more specific and more fully under their control, they made the traffic police role more tenable.

Intrarole Conflict

While even highly formalized role prescriptions remain vague in critical respects and especially in unanticipated situations, the formalizations often are internally contradictory. The very complexity and hierarchical nature of organizations insures intrarole conflict. On the one hand, each differentiated role in an organization conveys responsibility for performing functions and the skills relevant to their performance. On the other hand, organizations are hierarchical and each specialist, no matter how competent, is subject to authority from above. Should the author of an important policy report modify the recommendations at the behest of a superior who commissioned the report? The conflict between expertness and hierarchy is nowhere clearer than in the case of the US Navy disbursing officer who is held fiscally responsible by the General Accounting Office but is expected to respect the authority of officers of higher rank. If a particular payment sought by a commanding officer is deemed illegal, higher authority is likely to expect the disbursing officer to find a way to make the payment—to be "a can-do paymaster" (Turner, 1947).

The complexity of organization also contributes to intrarole conflict because the focal role involves interactions with multiple alter roles, each of which incorporates a somewhat different understanding of the focal role, reflecting their respective interests and values (Merton, 1957). The elementary school teacher, for example, must respond to often conflicting expectations from students, parents, and supervisors. Intrarole conflict also occurs because roles often incorporate multiple functions. While limited time and resources often preclude equal attention to all functions, the effective performance of one function may undermine the performance of another function, requiring ideally a delicate balance in executing the role. This is the case when both task and expressive leadership, as discussed earlier, are vested in

a single leader role. The teacher who should both maintain high academic standards and maintain student interest and enthusiasm often finds it difficult to achieve the right balance.

Intrarole conflict is another potent source for formal role-working role separation. Incumbents share experiences and often reach peer understandings of how to handle such conflicts, whether by agreeing to emphasize one function at the expense of another, denigrating the expectations of certain relevant alters, or dealing with the hierarchy-expert dilemma. We shall say more about how intrarole conflicts are resolved in a later section.

Office and Role

Everett Hughes (1937) observed that some organizational roles control behavior outside of the organization to which they apply. The house painter or carpenter or receptionist is seldom under critical organizational scrutiny when off the job. The role applies only to organizationally relevant behavior: to the *office*. But the competence and trustworthiness of a banker or physician or Christian minister who gambles on a day off from work or who dresses in a sloppy fashion may be questioned. A nominee for US Supreme Court Justice was described, somewhat derisively, in the newspaper as driving an "unwashed Volkswagen Beetle," something that contradicted the dignity of this high judicial post. This tendency for the role to be applied beyond the limits of the office is related to the importance of the representational aspect of a role. Representational aspects of a role assume greatest importance when relevant alters must place special trust in the focal role incumbent and when the focal role is responsible for protecting or promoting an important value.

ROLES IN SOCIETY

Functional group roles are anchored in particular groups and may have no carryover to other groups or larger settings. Position roles are anchored in particular organizations and may have limited if any carryover to different settings. But basic roles and value roles tend to apply across all group and organizational boundaries. Consequently, we say that they are anchored in society at large. The tendency for gender roles, for example, to affect participation in organizations and informal groups is illustrated by the frequency with which women are assigned responsibility for preparing minutes or serving coffee. While someone often may be able to escape from an uncongenial role by changing groups or organizations, the basic or value role is carried with one from setting to setting.

There appears to be some tendency for similar roles in different contexts to become merged and identified as a single role recurring in different relationships. For example, when we hear that someone becomes CEO of a corporation, we have at least an orienting idea of what is expected of him or her, based on the responsibilities of CEOs in other companies. Furthermore, roles in situations of limited generality and social significance tend to be shaped in accordance with roles in situations of greater generality and social significance.

Allocation Consistency and Interrole Conflict

Individuals play several roles, and this raises the question of consistency or inconsistency among the roles they play. When a person plays roles that call for contradictory kinds of action, such as kindness versus aggressiveness, openness versus scheming, or impartial judgment

versus friendly or familial bias, we speak of *interrole conflict*. To a considerable extent, contradictory roles played by the same individual do not come into conflict because society is compartmentalized. The jurist who is committed to be "tough on crime and criminals" in court can be forgiving of her children's offenses within the family. The "tight-fisted" business man can be "generous to a fault" toward his friends. Role incumbents are unlikely to experience any sense of contradiction between roles thus compartmentalized. Furthermore, there is a tendency for individuals to be allocated to compatible roles. For example, the jurist noted for his impartial judgment will be called on to preside over potentially controversial discussions in his club or church.

Deviant Roles

Deviance is of two kinds, namely, socially disapproved behavior (moral deviance) and physical or mental deficiencies that affect ability to perform roles in the usual way. Occasional minor morally deviant behavior may be reflected in evaluations of lowered role adequacy but seldom leads to deviant role allocation. But single acts of severe deviancy, such as murder, armed robbery, or an episode of insanity, or repetitive acts of minor deviance typically lead to deviant role allocation. As we have mentioned earlier, the specific deviance is generalized to a more comprehensive pattern of deviance, met with distrust, social avoidance or ostracism, and more punitive responses from the community. While the community conceives of these responses as steps toward reforming the deviant, they more typically have the effect of isolating the deviant who is forced into the company of other deviants, making reform more difficult, as labeling theorists have pointed out (Lemert, 1951) The representational aspect of the role becomes dominant to alters, while escaping the role or making it tenable becomes a dominant concern of the role incumbent.

When the individual is altercast into a deviant role revolving about competence rather than moral failure, such as the blind, the cripple, or the limited intelligence role, social expectations and pressures tend to force the incumbent into a limited pattern of activity. Robert Scott (1969) has shown how social agencies formulated a blind role into which the blind person must fit in order to receive necessary services and resources. Many individuals resist this altercasting, employing a variety of tactics of deviance disavowal (Davis, 1961), ranging from the blind person refusing to carry a white cane to much more assertive claims to normality.

From the point of view of tenability, there are benefits as well as costs to deviant roles, even though the latter usually outweigh the former. The principal benefit is freedom from many of the responsibilities of "normal" people. In such cases there may be a pattern of deviance avowal (Turner, 1972). Deviance avowal may be practiced to neutralize a personal commitment to conventional values, as well as to resist demands from alters. Willard Waller's (1930) interviews with divorced persons who had been raised to view divorce as an unthinkable sin revealed some telling examples. In one case the divorcee had reportedly attempted to overcome guilt by deliberately frequenting prostitutes and in other ways violating his own moral standards so as to neutralize his commitment to his own moral outlook.

Talcott Parsons (1951) formulated the concept of a sick role as a temporary role that grants the incumbent freedom from many usual responsibilities. The privileges of the sick role include exemption from social responsibilities and the right to expect to be taken care of and otherwise helped by family members, close friends, and the medical establishment. But these privileges are contingent on the incumbent's performance of the role obligations to want to get well and to seek medical advice and cooperate with medical experts. The specific nature of

these privileges and obligations and the specific procedures and criteria by which the individual is "certified" as eligible for the sick role are culturally quite variable (Gordon, 1966). The idea of a sick role can be generalized to a class of such exemptive roles, including a bereavement role, a drunken role (MacAndrew & Edgerton, 1969), and in some societies a "stress role" (Hogan, 1984). In all these exemptive roles the privileges are withdrawn after what is considered a reasonable period for recovery. In this respect they differ from disabled roles, which carry a lifetime insulation from selected responsibilities.

ROLE AND PERSON

While roles can be viewed organizationally and societally as at least vague frameworks for individual action, real persons must learn and hold role conceptions and enact roles, including dealing with both intrarole and interole conflict.

Role Learning

The idea of roles is learned by small children as they observe how different people act toward them and each other and discover the different privileges and obligations accorded boys and girls and younger and older children. Much of the actual learning of roles begins as very young children play at being mother, father, and baby, and children correct each other when they stray from an imagined script. But the critical observation is that roles are learned in pairs or sets. In order to play the role of a child one must develop at least a rudimentary conception of the roles of mother, father, older sibling, and others with whom one interacts frequently. The principle that one learns the most relevant alter roles in the process of learning one's own role continues throughout life. In school, students learn a great deal about the role of teacher as that role relates to students. The key to such learning is discovering what works in dealing with the teacher and what kinds of responses to expect to behavior in the focal role. This learning facilitates *role transitions*, as from child to parent, student to teacher, and employee to employer. This learning is not complete, since it supplies little guidance to relationships with the parent, teacher, or employer's other important alters. But it is an important first step in role learning.

The early learning of roles has more to do with representationality and tenability than with functionality. Children's play sharpens the role images: who is good and who is naughty, who has the right to give orders and who must comply with orders, who is interesting and who is dull. Awareness of tenability comes early as children compete to play at the "best" roles. Functionality comes later as the learners enact roles purposively with real consequences and begin to discover whether their playtime role conceptions work in real interaction.

Early and throughout the learning process the learner finds role models whose patterns of behavior are unwittingly or deliberately incorporated into one's own role conceptions and behavior. Parents, elder siblings, prestigious peers, popular heroes, and figures from books and other media are common examples.

Thornton and Nardi (1975) proposed that role learning takes place in a sequence of four steps. The *anticipatory* step takes place before role incumbency through media depictions and familiarity with people who play the role. Anticipatory learning tends to be stereotypical. The *formal* step comes with the start of role incumbency, involving prescriptions for behavior more than attitudes. The formal step is followed by an *informal* step, marked by a loosening

up and recognition of the range of variability with which a role may be played. As the incumbent becomes more competent and comfortable in the role there comes a *personal* stage in which one develops an idiosyncratic version of the role that suits the individual's unique disposition. Thus role learning proceeds from being fitted into a preestablished social mold to making a version of the role that is comfortably and expressively ones own.

Role learning has implications for the broader process of socialization, since most learning of values and norms takes place initially in the context of particular roles. As a result, there is no automatic carryover of values learned in one context to other contexts; hence, what we often call hypocrisy. A further stage of learning is required for values and norms to be generalized beyond the roles in which they are first learned.

Role and Person Merger

Because people play different roles in different contexts, roles have sometimes been regarded as only superficial clues to individual identity or personality. Roles often can be put on and taken off like work clothes and play clothes. The confidence man is a prototypical example of one who assumes and sheds roles at will according to shifting self-interest. An extreme view held by some scholars is that as persons we are no more one of our roles than any other; that we are as many distinct selves as we have different roles.

The more generally accepted approach is to recognize that roles vary in their depth and superficiality. For each individual, roles are arranged in a loose hierarchy from those most important to the individual's identity or self to those that matter relatively little to the role player. For roles high in one's hierarchy, performing at a high level of role adequacy is important, while poor performance of roles low in the hierarchy is not greatly disturbing to the incumbent. According to identity theory (Stryker, 1968), roles most closely linked to personal identity are most predictive of individual behavior.

In a different but compatible approach, Turner (1978) has offered a theory of *role–person merger*. Merger is indicated by three criteria, namely: (1) resistance to abandoning a role when it would seem reasonable to do so; (2) acquisition and internalization of attitudes and beliefs appropriate to the role; and (3) failure of role compartmentalization, with special emphasis on the latter. There are social structural constraints on role–person merger, chief among which is the identification of certain roles, such as the occupational role, as master roles, which are viewed as prima facie evidence of who the person is. Besides such structural constraints, role–person merger is propelled interactively by a sort of negotiation between the way others view the individual and the way the individual seeks to identify him- or herself. Three interactive principles guide the way others view the individual. The *appearance principle* states that, in the absence of contradictory cues, people tend to accept each other as they appear. The *effect principle* is that the greater the potential effect of someone's role on ourselves, the more we conceive that someone on the basis of the role being played. The *consistency principle* is that people tend to identify a person with a given role on the basis of consistency with observations of behavior in other settings. The individual tends to merge self with given roles on the basis of three principles: (1) the consensus principle is a tendency for us to view ourselves as others view us: the looking-glass self; (2) an autonomy and favorable evaluation principle is that we seek to identify most strongly with those roles in which we experience autonomy and favorable evaluations; and (3) the investment principle is that we tend to identify most strongly with those roles in which we have made the greatest investment, which often means those for which we have made great sacrifices.

Complementary to role–person merger is role distancing (Goffman, 1961). Role distancing consists of mechanisms for demonstrating that one does not take the role being played seriously or overseriously. Goffman described adults clowning while riding a merry-go-round so as to show any spectators that they were not taking the apparent role seriously. The childish role was incompatible with their self-conceptions as adults who were beyond such amusements. Goffman also described the surgeon who made flippant remarks to accompanying staff while completing a serious operation. In this case the point of role distancing was to signal that he was more than just a surgeon; that he had human qualities in addition to surgical proficiency.

Role Strain

The enactment of roles often involves anxiety, tension, and frustration, which can be summarized as an experience of role strain (Goode, 1960). Role strain can result from performance or fear of performance at a low level of adequacy, from role overload, or from interrole or intrarole conflict. Role strain will be most intense when it stems from roles that are merged with the person.

Low role adequacy can result from deficiencies of skill, talent, or motivation, lack of resources, or competitive disadvantage. The novice role incumbent often performs poorly until experience is gained. People often assume or are altercast into roles for which they lack sufficient training or ability. According to the Peter Principle (Peter & Hull, 1969), people in organizations tend to be promoted on the basis of good role performance until they reach their level of incompetence where they remain, which explains why organizations often do not function well and why role strain is a widespread organizational problem. A role incumbent may identify strongly with a role but have little motivation for performing the chore aspects of the role. For example, the enthusiastic teacher may find grading students unpleasant, or the strongly identified policeman may find the filing of reports difficult and unpleasant. In both cases, poor performance of the disdained aspect of the role often can affect relevant alters' judgment of overall role adequacy and provoke role strain in the incumbent. Competitive relationships raise the standards of role adequacy above what might otherwise be completely satisfying levels of performance. Deficiency in resources leading to low role adequacy and almost inevitable role strain can be illustrated by the physician without access to a well-equipped hospital, a research scientist without a laboratory or research grant, and a homeless or impoverished parent.

In all these cases of role strain both functional and tenability considerations push for some resolution. The obvious solution in many instances is to seek further training or make extraordinary efforts to secure needed resources. But the alternate solutions are to abandon the role or to lower personal identification (merger) with the role. The good teacher–poor administrator may choose or be pushed to return to the classroom, thereby solving both the functionality and tenability problems. Shifting personal identification to other roles so that low role adequacy matters less to the incumbent can relieve the tenability problem without solving the functionality problem. This is not an uncommon way of relieving role strain, as when workers start counting the years, months, and weeks toward retirement.

Role overload is a common condition when people play more different roles than they have time, energy, or resources for. For both men and especially women (in American culture), a career role often must contend with a parent role for time and energy. But the stress of multiple roles is often moderated because of the multiple benefits that come with multiple

roles and the possibility that compatible duties of different roles can sometimes be combined, according to a principle of *role accumulation* (Sieber, 1974). Most recent research has provided support for the role accumulation principle in the case of career and mother role combinations. In the tradition of Robert Park's (1928) early suggestion that highly creative persons usually have been "marginal men," caught between two cultures, Rose Coser (1991) argues that participation in multiple and complex relationships fosters reflection. Alienation in the workplace, she says, occurs principally at the lower organizational levels where workers do not have complex and multiple relationships.

Some kind of choice between or among contending roles may relieve role strain from role overload when there is insufficient accumulation. The obvious choice is to devote more time and energy to the role with which the incumbent is most strongly identified. But the choice does not always go in this direction, because a less fully merged role, such as the occupation or even a recreational role, may provide the resources necessary to support a more strongly identified family role. Also, at given moments, a choice in a less strongly merged role may be irrevocable, as when failure to attend a meeting will end chances for occupational promotion, so performance of the occupational role will be placed ahead of the family role (e.g., being home for daughter's birthday) regardless of the relative identification with occupational and family roles.

Interrole and intrarole conflict go beyond role overload in demanding behavior in one role that violates the values in another role. The scholar–politician who must withhold judgment until there is sufficient evidence but also must take early, clear, and forceful stands on controversial issues faces intense interrole conflict. The parent seeking to teach a child strict honesty and integrity who works as a salesperson and must make unsupportable claims for the superiority of the product being sold is likewise in an interrole conflict situation. The school principal who must convey often contradictory messages to the superintendent, teachers, and parents is in intrarole conflict. We have mentioned already that role compartmentalization can alleviate role strain and even awareness of conflict in many instances, until a crisis arises when compartmentalization is breached. When compartmentalization fails because relevant alters come into communication or because the individual's value system has been generalized beyond the boundaries of particular roles, much the same kind of choice situation arises as in the case of role overload.

Role Transitions

Throughout life, people give up roles and are allocated new ones. This is especially notable with the succession of age roles and in occupational life with promotions, demotions, and job changes. *Role transitions* (Allen & van de Vliert, 1982), even to more advantageous roles, are seldom as uncomplicated as they at first seem. Two overarching considerations are the foundation for a theory of role transitions. First, the change involves both internal and external transitions. The incumbent must make appropriate changes in behavior and attitude (internal) and relevant alters must change their behavior and attitudes toward the focal person (external) unless the changer can find a new social world in which to claim the new role. Second, role transition involves both adopting and being accepted into a new role and abandoning and no longer being viewed in the old role.

Subjectively, role transition may be facilitated or impeded if, as usual, it means leaving a role that is played reasonably successfully and comfortably (functionally and tenably) for a role that requires new learning and gaining new recognition. Transition may be similarly

affected because it always involves some change in relevant alters. For example, graduating from high school to college and from college to a profession mean weakening or abandoning old friendships and establishing new ones. Even the security of a practiced deviant role with familiar companions may be preferred to a less familiar socially acceptable role and the need to cultivate new and different friends.

Externally, support or nonsupport by others for the role transition is critical to its course. In the United States Navy, for example, the practice when an enlisted man is commissioned has been to transfer him to a different unit where he is not remembered and not likely to be treated as a peer or viewed with jealousy by former peers. Ambiguity of either role definition or role allocation is likewise an impediment to smooth transition. Transition is facilitated when it is formalized through rites of passage (van Gennep, 1909) such as graduation ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, and funerals and memorial services (for the survivors).

In cases where there is widespread ambiguity over role reallocation, patterns emerge that almost constitute transition roles. Thus the ambiguity in the United States over the transition from childhood to adulthood has led to considerable agreement on an adolescent role, marked by alternating independence and dependence behaviors and other unpredictable and often antisocial actions. In a revealing study of widows, divorcees, ex-nuns, ex-prostitutes, and other transitionists, Helen Ebaugh (1988) notes that "People in society are conscious of ex-statuses and place an individual in a social structure not on the basis of current role occupancy alone but also on the basis of who the individual used to be." Likewise, "Exs tend to retain role residual or some kind of 'hangover identity' from a previous role as they move into new social roles" (1988, p. 5). Thus we tend to know people as widows, divorcees, and ex-convicts in many situations.

ROLE CHANGE

Beyond the continuous role-making by individuals and the more or less stable accommodations between official and working roles, major changes in roles have taken place historically and continue to occur. Historical changes in gender roles, age roles, and religious leadership roles and professionalization of a variety of occupational roles are examples. Role change is always a complex matter because it means a change in role relationships with two or more roles necessarily changing in some kind of reciprocity Thus changes in student roles forced a change in teacher roles and changes in patient roles are forcing a change in physician roles. A model for role change suggests a separation between conditions creating an impetus to change and conditions facilitating or impeding the implementation of role change (Turner, 1990).

The impetus to role change begins with a change in cultural values attached to the role or its functions, altered demand for role services, changing social support, increased or decreased availability of needed resources, demographic changes in the number or personal characteristics of potential role recruits, or technological changes. Jerald Hage and Charles Powers (1992) attribute revolutionary changes in work and family roles to the transition from industrial to postindustrial society. Any of these conditions may mean changes in the networks that support the focal role, or in the most relevant alter roles, as when the societywide rise of democratic values changed women's roles and thereby forced compensating changes in men's roles, or when more assertive children's roles forced accommodative changes in parents' and teachers' roles. In some cases the resulting dysfunctionality, unacceptable representationality, or untenability of the role is handled by role reallocation, as when factories are moved to economically poorer areas that have been less affected by the relevant cultural and social structural

shifts and where workers are less demanding. Role reallocation is a then a substitute for role change, which is thereby aborted.

Implementation of role change requires a period of negotiation, leading to a more or less stable accommodation, but not necessarily consensus, about a revised pattern of role relations. Whether role change is completed or aborted by collective resignation to the old pattern depends on several factors. These factors include (1) whether there appears to be a realistically achievable role pattern whose benefit–cost ratio is more favorable than the old pattern; (2) the extent of structural autonomy of the role setting, the extent of freedom from close observation, or the weakening of normative controls over role performance; (3) the extent to which role incumbents are unified in their desire for role change and mobilized to promote change; (4) the extent to which there is mobilized "client" demand for the services this role provides or would provide under a new pattern; (5) the cultural credibility of the new role pattern; and (6) success in gaining institutional support for the new pattern, including in many cases legal and judicial action. (Turner, 1990, p. 107). Role changes that involve taking something away from one role and giving it to the other, such as transfer of the right to perform general medical services from pharmacists to physicians (Kronus, 1987) and the widespread diffusion of authority associated with democratization, often lead to fierce competition until outcomes are determined by a redistribution of power.

CONCLUSIONS

Networks of social roles constitute frameworks into which activities in society, organizations, and groups are organized and acquire meaning and by which individuals organize and understand the meaning of their own behavior and the actions of others. According to interactional role theory, roles are cultural resources but are typically vague, though people act as if they were real and relatively precise. Roles are continuously constructed and reconstructed as individuals engage in role-making in the course of interaction with incumbents of alter roles, or as legitimate role definers specify and respecify the organization of activity. When role definitions become ossified through formal organizational definition or strongly normative cultural tradition, or are too vague or internally or externally conflicting to supply a basis for action, the continuous process of role redefinition leads to the development of informal or working roles that deviate in significant ways from the formally recognized role definitions.

The dynamic reconstruction and role-making and the resolution of role conflicts are governed by three principles of functionality, representationality, and tenability. Roles are constantly modified for greater apparent effectiveness (functionality), limited by the understandings and misunderstandings of incumbents and legitimate role definers. Roles become vehicles for conveying certain images (representationality) and are framed and reframed in relation to what they are seen to represent. Roles are subject to continuous tension to supply a tenable balance of benefits to costs for role incumbents, limited by the power and resources of those incumbents.

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