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Survey of Investigations in Social Role Theory, Social Functioning, Role Conflict, Role Strain, Role Ambiguity, and a Proposal for Continued Research

Dennis A. Hunyadi
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SURVEY OF INVESTIGATIONS IN SOCIAL ROLE THEORY, SOCIAL FUNCTIONING, ROLE CONFLICT, ROLE STRAIN, ROLE AMBIGUITY, AND A PROPOSAL FOR CONTINUED RESEARCH

by

Dennis A. Hunyadi

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment
of the
Degree of Master of Arts

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
August 1976
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In writing this thesis, I have benefited from the encourage-
ment, advice and criticism from Mr. Louis Caputo, Professor
Stanley S. Robin, Professor Paul T. Mountjoy, and Mrs. Jane L.
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the Department of Psychology and the Department of Sociology
have made my graduate study challenging, rewarding and often
an exciting experience. My gratitude in no way removes me from
accepting the sole responsibility for what is written here.

Dennis Andrew Hunyadi
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The present research in social role theory specifically the areas of role conflict, role ambiguity, and role strain have raised many questions that remain to be investigated and have provided new areas for the application of these theories. One of the problems that faces the researcher in this area is the use of inconsistent terminology. There is little continuity amongst writers researching this area. Bruce J. Biddle has stated four shortcomings of role theory: "1. Lack of agreement on what is studied; 2. Lack of agreement on what to call it—and widespread use of common terms to mean quite different things. 3. Lack of an agreed upon propositioned structure constituting the core of the theory. 4. Lack of organized empirical evidence from studies tied to the theoretical propositions." 1 These four shortcomings pose a very large problem for the researcher who is interested in using this material in conducting empirical studies on interpersonal roles and role performance.

Although Biddle writes about the shortcomings in relation to role theory, it is equally applicable to the areas of role conflict,

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role ambiguity, and role strain. Gregory A. Blevins states in a review of the literature in role conflict and role strain, it was also indicated that the same inconsistencies in terminology exist. "First and foremost, the cross-section of authors that served as a basis for this paper reveal both conceptual inconsistencies and terminological inconsistencies...even when authors are in basic agreement in their respective definitions, there is the additional problem of different terms being assigned to those definitions. If, in fact, these concepts are not identical, then an attempt should be made to clarify their operational referents and systematically utilize the resulting set of concepts."¹

A criticism of the field of psychology and its use of the concepts of role theory was made by Allen E. Ivey and Stanley S. Robin. There is little, if any reference to where and how these terms have come to be used in the literature of Counseling Psychology. "While concepts of role appear frequently in counseling literature, relatively little reference has been made to underlying theoretical structure... . The concept of role and its accompanying formulations such as position, norm, and expectation are frequently used in different ways. Many writers in counseling seem to have this problem by referring to the word "role", impliciting trusting that readers will be in consensus with them

as to definition of the term."¹ The researcher encounters the problem of conflicting and ambiguous terminology not only in the field of sociology where the theory originated but in the field of psychology where the theory is being applied.

In relation to this literature a primary question that should be asked of the potential investigator is, in the light of the terminology conflict, why should anyone wish to study the area of role theory? Bruce J. Biddle and Edwin J. Thomas have established three areas that provide sufficient justification for research in this theory: "at least three general tasks deserve high priority. First, the large and complex domain that is role theory will have to be analyzed and more clearly defined. Second, the now particularly articulate vocabulary of role will have to be made more precise denotatively, more comprehensive of all the relevant phenomena requiring particular designation and more firmly established as a single, agreed-upon technical language. And third, the theoretical and empirical knowledge in the field will need to be reviewed, collated, organized, appraised and formulated into general statements."² These may be inappropriate criteria to be placed upon those who wish to investigate social role theory; however, what seems to be a more


productive and applicable alternative would be to organize the data collected from new empirical studies generated from the existing literature.

There are presently two contemporary attempts being made in the application of a cohesive role theory in the mental health profession. Dr. Frank McGuirk, the program evaluator of the Boulder Community Mental Health Center in Boulder, Colorado, has developed a role theory of maladjustment.¹ He has divided the individual's roles into interpersonal roles, productivity roles, civic roles, and self roles. In an intake questionnaire and client interviews an assessment is made of the person's level of adjustment towards these roles. The individual, with maladjustment in these specific roles is identified, is then placed into a treatment program that would be directly aimed at the maladjustment. Also, the client's performance outside the therapy environment can be determined by contacting significant individuals in the area of the presenting problem. For example, contacting the wife if the presenting problem is maladjustment of the husband's spouse role, the employer if it is poor adjustment to work roles, or the teacher if it is in the student role.

Secondly, the applied use of concepts in role theory are being developed into a measurement system to determine the

effectiveness of mental health agencies. In March, 1976, a two
day symposium was conducted jointly by the National Institute of
Mental Health (NIMH) and the Western Institute for Continuing
Health Education (WICHE). The purpose of this symposium was,
"to explore the means of assisting state mental health programs
in developing more adequate evaluation methods." The specific
goals of the symposium were: "1. To assess the needs of state
mental health agencies relative to measure of social functioning.
2. To identify those characteristics of social functioning that
are considered feasible to measure and usable by state mental
health agencies. 3. To identify and examine existing social
functioning measures and their characteristics vis-a-vis state
needs. (And) 4. To design a strategy to further develop and
implement social functioning measures where feasible." The term
social functioning as used at the symposium was narrowly defined
as; "In this context social functioning was perceived as a
continuum running from simple self-help skills (e.g., feeding
self) to community behavior (e.g., drug abuse) to the concept of
role performance (e.g., parent role)." Role theory is being
developed on a contemporary context among agencies that deliver
psychological services. If the ambiguity and conflict of terms
can be resolved then a viable method of assessment and treatment

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1McCullough, Paul M., "Symposium on Social Functioning,"
unpublished, Western Institute for Continuing Health Education,

2loc. cit., 3.
can be developed.

What may be the inevitable outcome of applying a role theory paradigm to community and state mental health agencies is the verification of program effectiveness, in that program effectiveness could be measured on how well and how efficiently it reaches goals set for the client population. The goals being outlined, explained, and defined in terms of a social role theory paradigm are easier to measure in terms of attainment of those goals. Dr. McCullough has discussed the questions frequently asked about program effectiveness. "At the clinical level the questions are most frequently about client problems, at the program level they are about intervention techniques and at the state level they are about the status of clients in institutions and/or community."1 The applied use of social role theory concepts can be organized to provide the answers to the effectiveness of an agency in all three of these areas.

This study is an attempt to present a clearer, qualified approach to the area of social role theory. Specifically, to the areas of role conflict, role ambiguity, and role strain. Each of these categories will be dealt with individually. The justification for researching these areas lies in the concept of inadequate role performance among clients being treated at

community and state mental health facilities. In relation to social role theory, the three reasons that an individual experiences or manifests maladaptive role performance are: 1. Role conflict, or the experienced difficulty in performing a role due to incongruent expectations of what is appropriate role performance. 2. Role ambiguity, or the lack of clearly defined expectations about the role(s) being performed and, 3. Role strain, or the experienced difficulty in the performance of the role(s).

A research proposal will be presented for additional investigation into the development of a questionnaire. This questionnaire will determine the existence of role conflict, role ambiguity and role strain, and to what degree they exist in a population in a community and in a population of clients actively using a mental health facility.
CHAPTER II

RESEARCH INVESTIGATIONS IN SOCIAL ROLE THEORY
AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONING

The Purpose

It is through the investigation of social role theory and the literature that has developed this theory that the researcher can organize his study so that the investigation will clarify existing research and add new knowledge to this area of research. Social role theory has been developed into a conceptual system that explains how individuals and groups interact with each other in a social milieu. It provides a description of this interaction both at the cognitive and behavioral level. In this section social role theory will be presented as a means of describing and defining this interaction. Inconsistencies among the terminology will be pointed out in this section as well as in the sections that follow.

Social functioning is a contemporary theory that is being developed to assess individual, program, and mental health agency effectiveness. The criterion used to determine this effectiveness is how well the agency programs develop adequate role performance among the people they serve. Social functioning is based on the concepts of social role theory; however, it lacks a complete development of the underlying theoretical base from

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which this theory was formulated. The presentation of both social role theory and social functioning theory will clarify the areas of similarity as well as the common underlying theoretical concepts.

The Investigations

Social role theory is a conceptualization of how an individual or group interacts within a social structure. The theory is a means of describing the norms, values, expectations and behaviors that a person or others hold for a specific role in the social structure (e.g., the role of the husband, teacher, sergeant in the army, etc.). Bruce J. Biddle and Edwin J. Thomas, describe the function or conception of a role as: "The idea of role has been used to denote prescription, description, evaluation, and action; it has referred to covert and overt process, to the behavior of the self and others, to the behavior of individual initiates versus that which is directed to him. Perhaps the most common definition is that the role is the set of prescriptions defining what the behavior of a position number should be." It is a theoretical approach to how and what an individual perceives, how he behaves and what he expects from his role in society, as well as, the individual's perception of what others deem as the norms, values, and performance of the role.

Biddle has described this concept for us, "Role theory may be said to deal with patterns of behavior or other characteristics which are common to persons and with a variety of cognitions held about those patterns by social participants. The conceptual distinctions of role theory center around a description of the patterns or of the cognitions. The propositions of role theory are concerned with the effects of the patterns upon the cognitions or the latter upon the former."^1 It is the interaction of how one behaves, what he thinks is appropriate behavior, and what he perceives others think is appropriate behavior for the position he is occupying in the social structure. Using this conceptual definition one can envision the many implications of the applied use of this theory not only in a description of a social structure but in mental health facilities, the classroom, and individual behavior. The significant reason for these implications would be that social role theory, in part, deals with patterns of behaviors that are common among a group of people with different ideas about those patterns. In other words, we all have personal idiosyncratic ideations of how we should perform a particular role; however, the patterns, or the way in which we perform, are basically similar amongst the group. A teacher may have his unique cognitions of what and how education should transfer knowledge to the

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student; however, the way in which one teacher performs his teacher's role is basically similar to the teacher in the next classroom. Biddle has stated;

"There are a number of reasons for the popularity of role theory; role concepts are deceptively simple. Role concepts relate to existing theories. They have application to other concepts and systems of social psychology... Role concepts have utility. They apply to a number of pressing human problems such as prejudice, authoritarianism, international relations, juvenile delinquency, mental health and the like. Role concepts seem easy to operationalize... Role concepts fit a democratic ideology. Role theory emphasizes the cognitive components of social behavior, thus placing responsibility for an individual's behavior within his own life space. Role theory tends to account, realistically, for man's present actions while implying, optimistically, that more effective action can be taken. Role concepts have heuristic value. To date, much of role theory has been stated so as to apply to both individuals and groups, to values and reality evaluations, to behaviors and to other human characteristics;"¹

However, the enthusiasm generated by these statements when one considers the possible application to mental health organizations and the development of an assessment measure is quickly abated because of the inconsistency of terms and the meaning of these terms. "One of the most persistent difficulties in role theory is the problem of defining position and role independently... A position is a set of persons who exhibit similar characteristics, who are treated similarly by others, or for whom a cluster of unique cognitions are maintained either by themselves or others.

¹ loc. cit., 2 & 3.
A role is a set of related cognitions maintained for a person or position by himself or another."^1 Clearer definitions of these terms are provided by Edwin J. Thomas and Ronald A. Feldman, "A position is a category of individuals who are similar in some respect. Role is the set of role expectations held by relevant others concerning how the rights and duties of a position should be carried out."^2 The existing research has confused these two concepts and has used them interchangeably in that role often meant position and position meant role.

Several other terms need to be defined at this point. The definitions that will be provided have been taken from Thomas and Feldman because of the clarity with which they present their descriptions and from Bruce Biddle because of his work in trying to integrate the existing literature in social role theory.

Firstly, role expectations, "is an idea by a relevant individual concerning how the occupant of a position should perform the rights and duties of that position. Expected behavior may involve something that a person is expected to 'do', an expected action: or may involve how a person is expected to 'be,' an expected behavioral attribute."^3 The expectations are realized in several ways. The individual may have certain

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^1 loc. cit., 4 & 5.


^3 ibid.
expectations concerning others' positions. The others may also have expectations concerning an individual's position(s) and expectations concerning their own positions (others' positions).

Secondly, a term that is used to describe the behavior of an individual in a social setting is, role performance, and has been defined as, "the behavior of an individual in a given position."\(^1\) Biddle describes this behavioral enactment of role expectations as a pattern or patterns of social behavior. He describes behavior as:

"Overt, physical activity of a human being...behaviors are: Transitory - change rapidly over time. Patterned-reoccur or show predictable qualities depending upon the environment. Voluntary - "result" from non-overt events taking place in the organism and the individual (ultimately) has control over his behavior. Directed - behaviors may or may not be directed towards other human beings. Purposeful - behaviors appear to tend toward end states (whether or not the observer assumes a motivation). Molar - behaviors are conceptualized in whole-organism units rather than in the motions of particular organs. And meaningful - behaviors are always conceptualized in terms of content, and any given behavior always has a number of content aspects each of which is shared with a number of other behaviors."\(^2\)

Using this concept of role performance as being overt, physical activity, the implication is that an investigator can develop a means of measuring role performance. However, what remains to be accomplished is the description of behaviors that constitute

\(^1\)ibid.

\(^2\)Biddle, Bruce J. *Present Status of Role Theory*, The University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, 1961, 10.
the specific roles. Once these can be identified then a measurement system can be developed.

Finally, the term role conception is frequently used in role theory literature and has been defined as; "how a member of a position thinks others expect him to perform in his position." 1 Biddle in his discussion of role theory terminology refers to role conception as a "private map" of what the person thinks of what others expect from him in the performance of his role. Also, these cognitions play an important part in the individual's interpretation of the events that occur around him and what meaning they have on his performance (e.g., how a teacher thinks her principal and superintendent want her to conduct her class or her conduct as a professional and the manner in which she interprets the event of a principal walking into her classroom three times in one day).

Every individual in the milieu has various roles to perform and each role brings with it its own attending behavior and cognitive expectations on what constitutes adequate and appropriate performance. Toby Jackson has stated, "Social roles are the institutionally proper ways for an individual to participate in his society and thus satisfy his needs and wants." Social role theory is a means of describing the interaction among

1 op. cit.
individuals at a behavioral-cognitive level. The society is viewed as the institution that has developed the roles and the positions that the individual can occupy. But the criteria for appropriate performance in these roles and positions is nonexistent or if such a criteria exists it is often vague and unrecognizable. The roles of teacher, husband, child, and student have been established by society but what elements comprise a good husband, teacher, child, or student has yet to be established in a qualified system.

Sheldon Korchin has discussed another important variable in role performance: that of the interaction between performance and personality. "Role and personality are independent concepts, but they interplay in three important respects. First, role membership shapes behavior directly. Living under social conditions, by values and expectations of particular groups develops particular modes of thinking and acting. Second, roles mold behavior in an indirect way, by providing frames of reference by which we evaluate our own actions. The role constitutes a 'reference group'... Finally, where choice is possible, persons elect roles compatible with their personal characteristics."^1 Our position in society directly affects how we behave and cognitively view our environment. Why we place ourselves in one position as opposed to another is due to the choices we make (if choice is possible). Korchin goes

on to state, "a common problem facing clinical and counseling psychologists is the person who, through fate, limited opportunity, or coercion, finds himself in roles which match his personal needs poorly." Through the development of empirical research using the concepts of social role theory the needs and the roles of the individual will be more clearly understood.

The discussions have centered around the presentation and definitions of terms used in social role theory. The next section (under the sub-heading of Social functioning) will deal with two programs that are in the process of being developed into a formal approach to individual role performance.

Social functioning

Social functioning theory is a specific contemporary application of the concepts derived from role theory. In essence, it is a concept that deals with the individual and the roles the individual enacts in his life space, i.e., work, spouse, student, or child. Dr. J. R. Newbrough defines social functioning to mean, "the ability of a person to do what is appropriate in any social setting. People do more or less well—some doing it adequately, some superbly. Others do not behave acceptably. This is noted, categorized, and named, and some action taken. The mental health agency becomes interested in failures at social

\(^{1}\text{ibid.}\)
role functioning since that is what often brings the person for help."\(^1\) He goes on to categorize the social roles that need to be noted, organized and named in order to assess the person's performance as adequate or inadequate (see Table 1 for specific categories of social functioning subdivisions). Evaluating the client in such a way enables the clinician to detect the role or roles that are below acceptable functioning levels and leading the individual to seek help. "This tells us where the problem exists and is rather like mapping it so that one can see if it can be changed."\(^2\) Social functioning evaluation is the narrowing down of social role theory to focus specifically on role performance and role conceptions of individuals seen in mental health facilities.

C. Clifford Attkisson has described several meanings of the concepts of social functioning.

"At least three important conceptual perspectives are relevant to defining the concept social functioning... The linear development perspective which assumes that persons vary in their capacity for and their environmental opportunity for socio-biological development. This perspective assumes that the goals intrinsic to the natural maturational process are movement toward: (a) personal independence and productivity, (b) interdependence, sharing, and working with others, and (c) capacity to educate the young toward personal


\(^2\) loc. cit, 21.
independence and social interdependence... Social role functioning from another perspective is viewed as the capacity and opportunity to make crucial life choices, to follow those choices with appropriate action, and to weather the consequences of choice and action...the existential perspective preserves and promulgates basic cultural mythologies: (a) persons are free to choose, (b) the essence of personal choice transcends biological and environmental determinism, (c) any other approach to conceptualization and measurement of social role functioning does injustice to the rights, freedom, and dignity of personhood.

The behavioral pragmatist perspective that views social role functioning solely within the framework of the contemporary culture of our mental health service delivery system. From this perspective developmental or existential issues are important only so far as they relate to the most primitive or fundamental personal/social behaviors and choices... The ultimate goals of the pragmatist approach are: (a) utility of data for decision making about behavioral/social control, (b) protecting the rights of society and the protection of property from threat by uncontrolled individuals, (c) assessing the economic value of human life and documenting the cost to society of those at primitive levels of social role functioning, and (d) shifting psychopathologist away from classical intrapsychic mentalistic, energy-based psychohydraulic ideology toward a more behavioral empirist ideology.

Attkisson has described social functioning to include several of the contemporary ideologies and their views on the acquisition of aberrant behavior. The development or incorporation of a social functioning measurement systems into mental health agency intake interviews and profiles would eliminate many misconceptions and misinterpretations of psychological diagnosis.

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TABLE 1. Categories of Social Functioning
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<td>Work roles: housewife</td>
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<td>Member of Nuclear Family unit</td>
<td>Feelings and satisfaction</td>
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<td>Quality of interpersonal relations</td>
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The theory of social functioning has been and is being applied to many content areas. There are also several major sources of information that may be used to collect data on the content areas. Table 2 provides a listing of the role components, major content areas and sources of information that are discussed in the Attkisson paper.

Another adaptation of social functioning that is presently being developed is a role maladjustment scale. Dr. Frank McGuirk is presently evaluating the effectiveness of this assessment measure with a client intake questionnaire and interview. Dr. McGuirk has stated, "One way of looking at human behavior is that much of one's efforts is directed toward meeting the expectations of other people in a manner which is also rewarding to oneself. These expectations are clustered into roles--father, subordinate, citizen, etc... The result of an intake profile using this theoretical basis is a straight-forward and useful description of the nature and degree of maladjustment in any client or clientele. For example, a therapist of any school could make a useful beginning of the knowledge that a client is unsatisfied and inadequate as a spouse." Table 3 represents the various role delineations and criteria for maladaptation.

This research provides a source of data that will clarify

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<td>Service providers</td>
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<td>Employers</td>
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<td>Relatives and significant others</td>
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<tr>
<th>Role Characteristics</th>
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<td>Expressive Roles</td>
<td>Communication skills and affective skills</td>
<td>Trained Evaluators&lt;br&gt;Service providers&lt;br&gt;Community caretakers&lt;br&gt;Relatives and significant others&lt;br&gt;Client</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marital role, parenthood, sexual functioning</td>
<td>Client&lt;br&gt;Relatives and significant others&lt;br&gt;Marital records&lt;br&gt;Health records&lt;br&gt;Community caretakers</td>
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<td>Antisocial Behavior</td>
<td>Fellow clients and Other Informants&lt;br&gt;Criminal Justice and other institutional records&lt;br&gt;Community caretakers&lt;br&gt;Relatives and significant others&lt;br&gt;Employers&lt;br&gt;Military service, educational and employment records</td>
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<td>Expressive Roles</td>
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<td>Self-care practices</td>
<td>Community caretakers, Service providers, Relatives and significant others, Health records, Institutional records, Fellow clients and other informants, Clients</td>
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<td>Social-Biological</td>
<td>Chemical Dependencies</td>
<td>Health Records, Relatives and significant others, Fellow clients and other informants, Community caretakers, Criminal Justice and other institutional records, Service providers</td>
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<td>Role Characteristics</td>
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<td>Social-Biological</td>
<td>Physical and Behavioral Impairments, Social modifiers, Quantifications and performance demanded by others</td>
<td>Trained Evaluators</td>
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<td>views to client or</td>
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<td>other informants</td>
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TABLE 3. Categories of Role Maladaption
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<th>Role Characteristics</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Criteria for Maladjustment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal roles</td>
<td>Child role</td>
<td>Fighting with siblings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bed-wetting, toy-stealing</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>, dependency problems,</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>inability to separate</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>from parent influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Close friend role</td>
<td>Inability to form friendships, propensity to destroy friendships, excessive conflict, inability to exercise constructive leadership, sexual problems, inability to accept peer norms, inability to participate in peer culture, excessive fear of social contact</td>
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</table>

Table 3
CATEGORIES OF ROLE MALADAPTION
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<tr>
<th>Role Characteristics</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Criteria for Maladjustment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Spouse role</strong></td>
<td>Fighting, sexual problems, abuse or negligence in drinking, conflicts in friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent role</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parent role</strong></td>
<td>Indifference, rejection, abuse, contribution to delinquency, inconsistent affection, provocation of acting-out, ineffective training and control procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acquaintance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Acquaintance role</strong></td>
<td>Excessive withdrawal, aggressiveness, inconsistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Productivity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Productivity role</strong></td>
<td>Unhappiness with work, lack of motivation, frustrated ambition, absenteeism, conflict, insufficient accomplishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Characteristics</td>
<td>Content Area</td>
<td>Criteria for Maladjustment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Productivity roles</strong></td>
<td>Domestic role</td>
<td>lacking basic skills in getting things done on time, i.e., cooking, cleaning, washing.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>being able to form a budget, no satisfaction from performing role, i.e., money, appreciation, self-actualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-development or student role</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>disorderly, antagonistic behavior, inability to study effectively, inability to be calmly and effectively tested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic roles</strong></td>
<td>Legal role</td>
<td>self-reported deviance, violations which have come to the attention of the authorities, police, school principal, lawyers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Characteristics</td>
<td>Content Area</td>
<td>Criteria for Maladjustment</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic roles</td>
<td>Subordinate role</td>
<td>Withdrawal from interactions with persons having authority Excessive deference, Extraordinary aggressiveness, and abusive ness toward authority figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self roles</td>
<td>Affective function</td>
<td>Fears, anxiety, excitements, rages which are discrepant from acceptable standards of appropriateness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive function</td>
<td>Delusion, confusion, 'inappropriate' word association, ideological conflicts (e.g., anomie, alienation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Habit function</td>
<td>Habits which are greatly out of line with expectations and lead to personal anguish and possible social censure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Characteristics</td>
<td>Content Area</td>
<td>Criteria for Maladjustment</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self roles</td>
<td>Survival</td>
<td>Individuals whose will to survive falls below cultural expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somatic function</td>
<td>If repeated medical examinations does not identify a physical source, an individual is considered maladjusted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and present clients' presenting problems in a more behavioral perspective. However, how valid and feasible this theory is to the mental health system has not been tested. "...does role maladjustment theory adequately dovetail with the views of clinicians? This theory is not intended to supplant clinical concepts of ego-strength, self-esteem, congruence striving... Rather, it is intended that the clinician see the ultimate problems and goals in these terms. The question of feasibility and compatibility needs to be tested by experience." ¹

Along these lines Dr. Myrna Weissman has discussed the dichotomy of past psychological assessments and the present approach to social adjustment or social functioning in identifying psychological symptoms. She has defined symptom to mean, "a reflection of the internal psychological or physical state that may have consequences in social relations," and the social adjustment as meaning, "a reflection of the patient's interaction with others, satisfaction and performance in roles, which are more likely modified by previous personality, cultural and family expectations." ² At this time there is speculation over the dependence and independence of symptoms and social adjustment. Researchers have maintained that these two concepts do not interact

¹loc. cit., 6.

with each other but should be treated as independent from one another. "The major roles any individual assumes are a function of age and may be a function of psychopathology. Normally, an adult will function in most of the following roles: occupational, marital, as a spouse and parent; within an extended family; and in the community. While there is an overlap between symptoms and social adjustment, they may also be relatively independent... There is debate about the independence of symptoms and social functioning. A resolution requires that they be measured separately and as accurately as possible."¹ Both Weissman and McGuirk are providing new methods of augmenting assessment measures to existing measurements that would deal specifically with individual role performance. What is needed at this time is new empirical research to test the effectiveness of these theories and how applicable they are to state and community mental health agencies.

In the following sections three other areas will be discussed that would further clarify and establish a rationale for poor social adjustment and role maladaptation. These sections will deal with role conflict, role ambiguity, and role strain.

Summary

Role theory was considered as a viable theory to be applied to the interaction of the individual and his social environment.

¹ ibid.
The terminology that was defined pertained specifically to the individual and his association with others while in the performance of his role. The literature that reports the research of role theory was presented as both having potential to provide significant future empirical studies and as being difficult to organize in a concise, cohesive body of literature because of the confusion of terminology used by investigators.

Social functioning and role theory of maladjustment was presented as a more specific, contemporary approach to the performance of individual roles. These theories have focused upon a specific concept of role theory, i.e., individual roles and their operational definitions of these roles according to adequate and inadequate performance. The application of these theories also differs from social theory in that they are applied to specific individuals as opposed to the functioning of a total social system. Social functioning and role theory of maladjustment have been presented as having application to a mental health agency.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH INVESTIGATIONS IN ROLE CONFLICT

The Purpose

The investigation of role conflict theory can be a valuable area of exploration in determining the primary factors causing maladaptive role performance. In assessing an individual's role performance, role conflict analysis will provide information on what the opposing or incongruent expectations are that are causing the conflict. The previous section discussed a method of identifying maladjustment in personal roles. Once these roles have been identified, further investigation into the causal factors of why this individual has manifested this maladapted role would add greater clarity to the development of an intervention program. The application of role conflict theory to this area would provide this information.

In this section role conflict will be discussed as a source of maladapted role performance. Research investigations have shown that unresolved role conflict often manifests itself in inappropriate behavior, i.e., inappropriate role performance.

The area of role conflict resolution will also be discussed. This research provides information on the appropriate and inappropriate means of functioning in conflict situations.

Through the clarification of the concepts of role conflict
theory the application to people identified as having inappropriate role performance can be made.

The Investigations

Dr. John T. Gullahorn and Jeanne E. Gullahorn have defined role conflict as, "a situation characterized by all of the following conditions: (1) a decision is required of a person whose role is such that he is expected to decide; (2) the decision is between two or more response alternatives, each of which will fulfill the legitimate expectations of an Alter with claims upon the person; (3) no decision open to the person will satisfy the requirements imposed upon him by all of the expectations or obligations in conflict. In general, no matter what Ego decides he will fail to fulfill some of the legitimate expectations imposed upon him by his role(s)."\(^1\) Simply stated by Ronald Feldman and Edwin Thomas, "role conflict is the opposition of role expectations for a position such that a position member cannot perform in terms of all of them at the same time."\(^2\) The individual is in a position of "no exist". The pressure and intensity of the conflict will be determined by the significance


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that is placed upon the opposing expectations.

Biddle suggests that role conflict can be experienced both at the cognitive and behavioral level. "In contrast with overt conflict, role conflict does not necessarily involve observable events—such as aggression—although these latter may result from role conflict. On the other hand, incompatible role cognitions held by distinct persons cannot be termed "role conflict" unless those persons are in communication in a common institution in which their incompatible cognitions are expressed."¹ Role conflict may exist at the cognitive level but the antecedent events that lead to the conflict ideation were behavioral (e.g., a conversation). Biddle explains that the majority of role conflict studies have not been able to define a behavioral level of conflict, which seems to suggest that the investigators have approached this area solely at the cognitive level.²

Two types of role conflict were discussed in the Gallahorn article, status-produced and contingent role conflict. They have defined these types as: "(1) status-produced role conflict, developing from incumbency in a single status subject to incompatible expectations or objections and (2) contingent role

²ibid.
conflict, resulting from incumbency in two statuses, both of whose legitimate sets of expectations cannot be fulfilled simultaneously."¹ Thomas and Feldman have also described two types of role theories, however, they have explained the origin of conflict in terms of the person's position in society. They have eliminated the variables of "status produced" and "contingent-produced" conflict. There are two types of role conflict: a. intrapositional role conflict arises from occupancy of one position in which there are opposing role expectations with respect to what the occupant of that position should do. b. interpersonal role conflict arises from occupancy of two or more positions, each with attendant expectations, and which together place role expectations upon the individual such that he cannot perform in terms of all of them at the same time."² A conflict situation can arise from occupancy in one role, i.e., spouse, or occupancy in more than one role, i.e., spouse, labor leader, parent.

Allen E. Ivey and Stanley S. Robin have established four types of role conflict in their investigation of high school counselors. "Role conflict occurs in a situation in which there is systematic difficulty involved in assuming, maintaining a role or functioning in a role situation. The basic types of role conflict follow. 1. Role conflict stemming from role definers.

¹ Gullahorn, Gullahorn, op. cit.
² Thomas, Feldman, op. cit.
2. Role conflict internal to the role. 3. Role conflict stemming from the role in an interaction with the social system. 4. Role conflict stemming from the interaction of the individual and his role.\textsuperscript{1} These four types can be understood in the terms of interpositional and intrapositional role conflict, in that they can be expressed as either role conflict stemming from the occupancy of one position or more than one position.

John T. Gullahorn, in another publication, has provided an example of assessing the existence and the types of attitudes or cognitions that result from being in a conflict situation. In this article Gullahorn defined role conflict as, "the situation in which incompatible demands are placed upon an actor (either an individual or group) because of his relationship with two or more groups."\textsuperscript{2} He investigated the incompatible relationship between the role of labor leader (e.g., chief shop steward) and membership in the employees club (established by the management of the company). A list of hypothetical situations were placed in a questionnaire and given to members of the local union. The response options for the people that were tested were, "resign...


from the club office, retain both positions, or resign from the position of chief shop steward." An example question was, "An officer of the company tells you that if you continue your good work in the Employees Club it may lead to a management position.

What if—The union executive committee wants you to keep the club office—the people you represent want you to serve as steward."^2 It was his findings that, "support was presented for the hypothesis that one characteristic of such role conflict is an increasing tendency to view the dilemma unrealistically."^3

An example of intrapositional role conflict (that of occupying one position), was presented by Allvar Jacobson in his investigation of marital attitudes between divorced and married couples. In this study married and divorced couples were interviewed concerning their expectations towards the roles of husband and wife. Role was defined as, "culturally ascribed pattern of behavior, including duties, expected or required of persons behaving in specific social situations."^4

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^1 loc. cit., 303.
^2 ibid.
^3 loc. cit., 302.
revealed that divorced couples had greater disparity concerning the roles of husband and wife. Differences in attitudes towards these roles among divorced couples were approximately four times greater than the attitudes of married couples.  

Talcott Parsons has applied the theory of role conflict to the area of deviant behavior and motivation (this is the only study that deals directly with deviant behavior; other studies have provided descriptions of inappropriate means of resolving role conflict). Parsons has established the concept that the effect of role conflict can lead a person to exhibit deviant behavior. "The consequences of the factors in the genesis of deviant motivation and behavior may be compounded by the factor of role conflict." Difficulty arises when the individual is faced with living up to incompatible expectations. An example of incompatible expectations would be a "compulsive conformity pattern" and a pattern that stretches a "normative pattern" to the point of active rebellion, such as a teenager living in a home dominated by a strict authoritarian father and being a member of a peer group that is frequently in trouble with the local police. Parsons continues his explanation of role conflict

1 loc. cit., 302.


3 ibid.
by stating, "Exposure to role conflict is an obvious source of strain and frustration in that it creates a situation incompatible with a harmonious integration of personality with the interaction system. There must be external frustration, internal conflict or both... Indeed what, on the interaction level if not the fully developed social role level, is exposure to conflicting expectations of some kind may be presumed to be the generic situation underlying the development of ambivalent motivational structures with their expression in neuroses, in deviant behavior or otherwise." Role conflict has been discussed as a negative concept in that it precipitates deviational behavior and motivation. However role conflict can also lead to positive individual and social change. "...on the other hand role conflict can be seen to be very important as a source of motivations leading to social change, through some sort of undermining of the motivational basis of an established order." Role conflict is viewed by these investigators as a dynamic concept in that it leads to some kind of change. The individual in a conflict situation is motivated to reduce the conflict. The remainder of this section will deal with the process, both negative and positive, of reducing this conflict.

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1 loc. cit., 276.

2 ibid.
Biddle has discussed the problems that lead to the resolution of role conflict. He states, "There are but a few routes by which such incompatibilities can result in problems for the object person. (1) The object persons may become "aware" of the incompatibilities held—in our terms he may accurately attribute cognitions to others. (2) On the other hand, the object person may become the target of behaviors directed towards him by others holding incompatible cognitions which the person may or may not understand. (3) Finally, it is possible that the others might pose problems for the person through the manipulation of others or physical objects in the setting."¹ The individual may correctly assess the situation, he may not understand what is happening to him, or the intensity of the conflict may be increased by active manipulation of the environment. Once the person is in this predicament (conflict situation) some means of resolution is necessary.

Neal Gross, et. al, have established three types of resolutions that are described in terms of individual personality types. They are: "moral orientations to expectations, expedient, and moral-expedient." Firstly, the individual who is dealing with a role conflict situation at the "moral orientation" level will weigh the incompatible expectations placed upon him in terms of legitimacy or illegitimacy of those expectations. He

then will fulfill only those that he has decided are legitimate. Secondly, the individual functioning at the "expedient" level will assess the expectations in regard to what the "negative" sanctions will be if he does not conform to the expectations. In other words, he will try to minimize the negative outcomes involved in a role conflict situation. Finally, the "moral-expedient", takes into account both the legitimacy and what the negative sanctions will be if he does not conform to the expectations. In other words, he will try to minimize the negative outcomes involved in a role conflict situation. Finally, the "moral-expedient", takes both the legitimacy and the negative sanctions for non-compliance into account and then acts in a manner that he perceives as a "net balance".1

John T. Gullahorn and Jeanne E. Gullahorn have also presented three means of resolution which are described as "...when Ego considers a situation to be a role conflict (whether or not it is one from a sociological viewpoint), there appear to be three means of resolving the dilemma. (1) He may accept responsibility for decision and decide among the competing claims made on him; (2) he may delay the responsibility for decision; (3) he may reject the responsibility for decision..."2


2Gullahorn, John T., Gullahorn, Jeanne E., "Role Conflict and Its Resolution", op. cit., 43.
These means of resolving role conflict provide information as to how a conflict situation can be resolved but little information is provided as to why a certain means was chosen over one of the others. The investigation of individual personality factors can provide an explanation of why a certain type of resolution was chosen.

Robert L. Kahn, et. al., have attempted to explain the function of personality factors of individuals in role conflict and role ambiguity situations. They state, "Such factors effect role episodes in several ways. First, some traits of the person tend to evoke or facilitate certain responses from his role senders. Second, it is likely that some persons will experience role pressures differently than others; that is, personality factors will act as conditioning variables in the relationship between the objective and experienced situations. Finally, we are interested in the extent to which personality predispositions lead to the use of certain kinds of coping responses. In sum, personality factors are seen as important determinants of differential elicitations of role pressures and differential reactions to role pressures." These authors have also established three types of "coping responses and feedback cycles." Firstly, the object person may react in a hostile manner to his role senders via the frustrations and tensions of being in such a

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conflict situation. This would be termed as aggressive action and communication towards his role senders. Secondly, the object person, "focal person," may directly approach his role senders in that he openly and directly communicates his position to the "alters" that have contributed to the conflict situation. Finally, the individual may seek to avoid or reject specific demands that he is having difficulty in fulfilling. He does not reject the total situation or the total group of alters but becomes exclusive as to which demands he chooses to conform to.¹

Two additional research studies that provide further and similar information on role conflict and resolution of role conflict are supplied by Robert Merton and Jackson Toby. In his article, Merton has discussed the concept of role conflict as inevitable or "inherent" in the role-set in that because of multiple occupancy of different roles conflict cannot be avoided. He has established six mechanisms that aid in the "articulation" of these role sets and how they operate between role partners. These mechanisms (briefly stated) are, "1. The mechanism of differing intensity of role-involvement among those in the role-set. 2. The mechanism of differences in the power of those involved in a role-set. 3. The mechanism of insulating role-activities from observability by members of the role-set. 4. The mechanisms for observability by members of the role-set of their conflicting demands upon the occupants of a social status.

¹loc. cit., 281.
5. The mechanism of social support by others in similar social status with difficulties of coping with an unintegrated role-set. And 6. Abridging the role-set: disruption of the role-relationship.¹

Jackson Toby also discusses the concept of role conflict as a normative conflict which is the result of simultaneous occupancy in more than one role or with more than one group. He makes a distinction between "true role conflict and pseudo-role conflict." A true role conflict would be a situation in which there is no means provided by the social structure, to resolve the conflict, and in a pseudo-role conflict situation individuals could have prevented the conflict from occurring if they had the proper skills. Toby has also described several tactics for avoiding and postponing decisions. One is the use of an "excuse" to avoid making a decision. "Another kind of legitimate non-compliance, a cousin of the "excuse", is the claim of the actor that his failure to fulfill his obligations is involuntary... circumstances beyond his control prevented him from carrying out his good intentions."²

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Research in the area of role conflict theory has established that conflict is experienced at the cognitive level and is expressed at a behavioral level. Role conflict is the result of occupying more than one role simultaneously and these roles place incompatible demands on the individual occupant. Role conflict can also occur in the occupancy of only one role that has incompatible demands placed upon the individual occupant by significant others.

In the area of deviant motivation and behavior, it was established that role conflict can have a "compounding" effect on the development of deviance. Also, the interaction between personality and social role conflict can effect the choice one makes in coping with the conflict situation. However, further investigation is needed to establish what and how this interaction influences the choice of resolution.

Finally, role conflict resolution was discussed in terms of avoidance, direct confrontation, selective compliance to incompatible demands, and aggressive action against role senders (those placing their demands upon the focal person). Further means of resolution were the excuse, the accident, and illness, as an escape from complying to incompatible demands.

Research has indicated that role conflict can be applied to the area of determining inadequate role performance. Inadequate role performance can be a result of poor role conflict resolution.
However, further research is needed to determine the precise manner in which these areas interact.
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH INVESTIGATIONS IN ROLE STRAIN

The Purpose

Researching the area of role strain and the development of a technique that would determine the presence of strain may lead to another determinant in the maladaptation of any individual's role performance. What would be of greater significance in dealing with this determinant is the use of a role strain measurement to assess the likelihood of the development of a role conflict. In using this criteria, role strain may be used as a community prevention measurement; in that, as strain in a role increases the likelihood of role conflict increases. This type of prevention, on a community level, could serve to identify individuals in the social structure who are having difficulty in the performance of their roles before a conflict situation occurs. Once identified, an intervention program could then be developed outside the mental health agency (e.g., in the home, at the place of employment).

In this section research in the area of role strain will be discussed. The terminology used will be defined and the applicability to health programs and community prevention programs which takes place in mental health agencies and at other places outside the agency will be presented.
The Investigations

Sociologists have treated the areas of role conflict and role strain as two independent subject areas. Although the distinction between these areas is often very slight (some of the research seems to indicate that although one author wished to investigate role conflict he is really testing role strain), independent investigation is warranted and feasible. Dr. William J. Goode has described social systems in relation to a role model approach. He states, "When social structures are viewed as made up of roles, social stability is not explicable as a function of (a) the normative consensual commitment of individuals or (b) normative integration. Instead, dissensus and role strain—the difficulty of fulfilling role demands—are normal." An article written by J. Diedrick Snock has maintained that role strain is a direct function of the diversity of role sets. That is, the more complementary the roles that an individual performs the higher the degree of strain will be. Edwin J. Thomas and Ronald A. Feldman have defined role strain as, "the experienced difficulty of a position member in performing in that position."

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Basically, what these authors have indicated here is that:

(1) Role strain is a basic part of our everyday lives and is the norm for interaction within the society. (2) Role strain is a function of the various demands placed upon the performance of a role, in that, as we increase the number of roles we increase the amount of experienced strain or difficulty in the performance of that role. One example of this would be a manager of a large grocery store. It is his job to deal effectively with the people who are working for him in the sale of his product, the customer who buys his product, the purchasing agent who buys the product that he sells, the owner of the store who might wish to increase the profit of his store, the regulatory commissioners who inspect his store to meet state and federal standards, and the local organizations of large grocery store owners. All these areas of interest are complementary in that they deal with the role of manager of a large grocery store and the diversification as a function of dealing with several groups with various expectations and demands placed upon the incumbent. Finally, role strain is the experienced difficulty in the performance of this position or role.

William J. Goode has developed four types or sources of role strain.

"First, even when role demands are not onerous, difficult, or displeasing, they are required at particular times and places...virtually no role demand is such a spontaneous pleasure that conformity with it is always automatic."
Second, all individuals take part in many different role relationships, for each of which there will be somewhat different obligations. Among these there may be either contradictory performances required...or conflicts of time and place or resources.

Third, each role relationship typically demands several activities or responses...Perhaps most jobs fall into this category, in that their various demands create some strain as between the norms of quantity and quality, technical excellence and human relations skills, and universalism and particularism.

Finally, many role relationships are "role sets", that is, the individual engages, by virtue of one of his positions, in several role relationships with different individuals."

In essence Goode has described what occurs in everyone's daily lives. We experience some kind of role strain by the fact that we interact with people. "Role strain--difficulty in meeting given role demands--is therefore normal. In general, the individual's total role obligations are overdemanding." What is the unique quality of role strain (as opposed to role conflict) is that the individual is still able to meet the demands or the role expectations of himself and others, based on the underlying assumption, "that the individuals who face common obligations can generally fulfill them." In role conflict, the underlying assumption is that the individual is unable to

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2 ibid.

3 loc. cit., 484-485.
fulfill satisfactorily the demands or expectations of himself and others.

J. Diedrick Snoek has established four common problems or four ways in which role strain can be categorized among individuals performing in diversified role sets (role sets refer to the total complimentary roles that the individual performs, i.e., the large grocery store manager is an example of a role set).

"At the top of the list are direct conflicts, in which incompatible role expectations from two or more role senders must somehow be reconciled. A second common problem is that of overload, a condition which exists when the demands from all sources pile up to a total in excess of the worker's capacity...typically experienced as conflicts between priorities...distinguished from intrarole conflicts in that the demands upon the role occupant are not inherently incompatible. Ambiguity...Because members of the same role set occupy such a variety of positions, implicit assumptions are often not shared, unspoken rules are broken, and unexpected failures of communication tend to occur. Finally,...

influence without legitimate authority. In diversified role sets, we often encounter relationships in which there is no provision for the exercise of legitimate authority (e.g., customers and suppliers)."

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Evaluating this study in the light of the other literature dealing with role theory, role conflict, and role ambiguity, it would seem that the four common problems are not attributed solely to role strain, although all four would place strain on performance. Role "overload" would be the specific definition or descriptive example of role strain. Direct conflicts would be in the area of role conflict theory and ambiguity in still another concept area. "Influence without legitimate authority authority" would fit into the role concept area which is described by Thomas and Feldman as, "role discontinuity—which is the lack of correspondence between expectations concerning one position that an individual has held and the role expectations associated with a different position he now has or has held."¹

Finally, in the area of role strain resolution, William Goode has described several means or mechanisms which may be utilized by the individual to reduce strain in role performance: "The individual can utilize two main sets of techniques for reducing role strain: Those which determine whether or when he will enter or leave a role relationship and those which have to do with the actual role bargain which the individual makes or carries out with another."²


Goode describes six ways in which an individual or "Ego" has to determine if he will accept the relationship and at what time he will accept the role relationship. (1) "Compartmentalization," in this form of strain reduction the individual makes his legitimate demands on another only during specific times. In so doing his claim on the "other" need not be accounted for. An example of this would be a crisis situation. Once the crisis is over there is no need to make further demands. (2) "Delegation," this is somewhat similar to compartmentalization; however, the individual "contracts out" roles which are inconsistent with his expectations and causing strain, (e.g., hiring a babysitter so that the wife may continue her career). (3) "Elimination of role relationships," often it may be impossible to eliminate a relationship because many of our roles flow from our position status. However there are some relationships that are possible to curtail, i.e., friendships, or moving into another job. (4) "Extension," the expansion of role relationship can function in two ways: it can be used as an excuse for not meeting certain obligations or it can facilitate other role demands, i.e., joining an exclusive country club. (5) "Obstacles against the indefinite expansion of ego's role system", this concept is developed on the basis of limited resources at anyone's command. "The rewards cannot increase at the same rate as the expansion even if at first he increases his skill in role manipulation, because eventually he must begin to fail in some of his
obligations, as he adds more relationships.1 6) "Barriers against intrusion," this mechanism is the use of various techniques for preventing others from beginning a relationship or continuing a role relationship. A cue in detecting this mechanism is the verbalized statement "I have no time". It is often the case that the individual has the time but he wishes to use that time as he sees fit. Men or women, such as high level executives, take on a wider range of role opportunities and have to make more choices. They experience a greater degree of role strain and thus a need to reduce strain through inaccessibility. Examples of this mechanism would be a school superintendent who only meets with the public during meetings of the school board that are open to the public or a doctoral candidate who rents a small cubicle in the library to work on his dissertation.2

In conclusion, the theory of role strain as presented deals with the normal occurrences of how individuals perform their roles and what the mechanisms are for reducing role strain. However, what remains to be included in this body of literature is the inclusion of personality factors that may lead to the determination of how one person is able to deal with more strain and another person with less. Also, the underlying assumption is that individuals can and do fulfill their role demands under a certain amount of strain, but at what point is it the case that this

1loc. cit., 486.
2loc. cit., 486-487.
assumption is no longer operating, the individual cannot fulfill his role requirements. A measurement technique that would determine individuals in a high degree of role strain would be useful for corporations in dealing with executives and employees, the community mental health agency in determining high risk groups whose mechanisms of coping with strain are or may begin to break down and the educational system in that, they may be able to teach and structure their curriculum so that students would be able to work from areas of low degree to high degree of strain.

Summary

The research literature in role strain theory has primarily centered around the role performance of individuals in diversified role sets. The concept investigated is that the more diverse the role set (roles or jobs that deal with more than one individual or group, i.e., waitresses, store managers, professors), the more strain will be experienced by the position incumbent.

Three sources of role strain were discussed: (1) fulfilling role demands are not a spontaneous automatic enjoyable response, (2) individuals take part in many different role relationships, and (3) each demand does not require only one response but several responses. These sources have been explained as a part of the normal life style that all people in a social system experience. At this time there has not been an attempt to investigate role strain theory with a client population of a community or state.
mental health center or with a population where the underlying assumption of "being able to fulfill role obligations" is not operative.

Finally, six mechanisms that are open to persons to reduce or eliminate role strain were discussed. Again this literature was applied to a population that was assumed to be functioning normally within a social structure.

The application of this theory to the development of empirical studies dealing with identifying individuals with a high degree of role strain would yield important information in the development of a community prevention program. Once individuals or groups have been identified as having a disproportionate degree of strain to the position that they occupy, an intervention program could then be instituted outside of the mental health agency, before the mechanisms for the reduction of role strain begin to provide less and less satisfaction to the individual.
CHAPTER V

RESEARCH INVESTIGATIONS IN ROLE AMBIGUITY

The Purpose

The social role theory concept of role ambiguity provides still another determinant of inadequate role performance. The lack of role clarity or definition of what is required in the performance of a role will lead to misunderstanding, strain, and conflict among participants in a social position. The individual may not know what is expected of him or not understand what is being done to him. The learning process of what the expectations are may be blocked because of the frustration and anxiety experienced by the occupant in dealing with such an unstructured, unpredictable position. The advantage of determining high degrees of role ambiguity would be the development of an educational model to clarify expectations and demands that will be placed on the position occupant. This model would function as a prevention system, such as an orientation procedure or intervention method applied during the performance of the role or job, such as an in-service training program.

The use of such models is not a novel or unique idea, however, investigating the research on the particular area of role ambiguity would lead to more precise application of such programs to a select group of individuals. In that, the ability to
determine who are and who are not at a high level of ambiguity would streamline the programming and increase the efficiency of the position.

The Investigations

The research literature in the area of role ambiguity is slight and is dealt with indirectly within the context of other areas that are being researched (e.g., women's expectations of actual roles, age roles and sex roles). Edwin Thomas and Ronald Feldman, two authors who have addressed this concept directly, have defined role ambiguity as, "a lack of clarity of role expectations about the rights and duties of a given position." The position occupant is unable to define or understand what his obligations are in fulfilling his role requirements. Placing this in a social interaction paradigm, the position occupant who is uncertain of what is expected of him is in a predicament as to how he is supposed to relate to others and in turn their relationships or actions towards him.

One area of investigation is to determine the amount and the availability of information concerning that position. Kahn, et al., have discussed this issue in terms of how does one assess the role position potential for clarity and ambiguity. "...The potential degree of clarity and ambiguity in a role can be assessed

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by investigating the availability of relevant information within the role set. The degree of objective ambiguity for a focal position will depend...on the availability of that information to the position. The experienced ambiguity of the occupant of the position will reflect the objective situation as it interacts with relevant properties of the person (need for cognition)."¹

Basically, the degree to which ambiguity both objective and expressive (subjective) will be measured by the observed verbal behavior of the individual. Furthermore, the behavior of the individual is a function of past learning experiences, what has been reinforcing in the past under these stimulus conditions will be used in the new situation. However, what was learned as previous acceptable actions may not appropriately function in the present situations thus setting up the condition of ambiguity or conflict. "When pressures from associates are especially strong and directed towards changes in the behavior of the focal person, or when they are contradictory to one another, the experience is apt to be fraught with conflict and ambiguity, and to evoke responses of tension, anger, or indecision...The specific reactions of each focal person to a situation are immediately determined by the nature of his experience."² The assumption


² ibid.
here is the desire on the part of the individual to know the role expectations, i.e., the "rights and duties" of his position. When this information is unavailable or the individual lacks the resources to gain this information, then the interaction between role occupant and role senders may become an angry discourse. The occupant will be unable to make appropriate decisions or he may avoid decisions. Kahn, et. al., describe this process in terms of a communication model between the focal person and role senders. "In sum, the role episode is abstracted from a process which is cyclic and on-going: the response of the focal person to role pressures "feedback" on the role senders of those pressures in a way that alter or reinforce them. The next role sendings of each member of the set depend on his evaluations of the response to his last sendings, and thus a new episode begins."  

The coping mechanisms that are of significance in the feedback cycles (also discussed in Chapter 3 on role conflict resolution) according to Kahn are the rise of aggressive actions and communications, attempts to avoid or reject role senders demands that cause difficulty, and approaching role senders thus increasing effective communications.  

The Kahn study indicates that there is little behavioral differentiation in the actions of those motivated by role conflict or role ambiguity. It is their view

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1 loc. cit., 279.

2 loc. cit., 281.
that role ambiguity and role conflict are not independent concepts, but dependent. That is, the higher the degree of ambiguity or disagreement between the focal person, the greater the intensity of role conflict.

Arnold H. Rose has discussed the concept of role clarification in his research dealing with college women and their expectation of adult roles.¹ His study compared the expectations of college men and women in the areas of hiring servants for specified tasks (e.g., cooking, house cleaning, child raising), getting a job, vocational training that the students were involved in, spare time activities, group organizations they were expecting to join, and expected hours spent in civil and social welfare work. Also, the groups were differentiated between men and women from higher and lower economic backgrounds, "Better-off students and poorer students."

The findings of this study indicated that college women viewed adult roles with, "a certain inconsistency, lack of definitions, and lack of realism about expectations for adult roles...The proportion of women college students confused in these ways is significantly larger than among men college students."² Rose also stated, "the conclusions suggest that future research would reveal that these inadequacies in expectations would create

²loc. cit., 76.
certain problems for adult women, such as poor success in carrying out some adult roles or mental conflict over which roles to concentrate on. Such a statement at this time and era of the feminist movement is a highly volatile argument. However, it may be viewed as an example of the clarification process. The Rose study emphasized the gap that exists between the traditional concept of women's place is in the home and the positions they had already assumed in the economic system -- jobs that women had taken over during World War II, and exposure to social positions that did not center primarily around the maintenance of the home. This gap produced an ambiguous status of what is the definition of a woman's role. The feminist movement, as seen in the light of social role theory, is a clarification process between traditional and present day role expectations.

In conclusion, Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr. discusses twelve propositions that a social order may or may not provide in aiding proper social adjustment. Cottrell specifically dealt with age and sex roles, but his categorization is applicable to any role under investigation. In discussing these propositions, Cottrell states, "It is my opinion that if these propositions were put in the form of questions about any given cultural role, the answers would fairly precisely indicate the degree of adjustment which individuals are likely to make to such a role. The answers would

\begin{footnote}
\text{loc. cit., 76-77.}
\end{footnote}
also indicate the chief sources of maladjustment.\textsuperscript{1} Several examples of these propositions are: "I. The degree of adjustment to roles which a society assigns to its age-sex categories varies directly with the clarity with which such roles are defined. II. The degree of adjustment to specified age-sex roles varies directly with the consistency with which others in the individual's life situations exhibit to him the response called for by his role...VIII. The degree of adjustment to a future role varies directly with the degree of clarity with which the future role is defined...And X. The degree of adjustment to a future role varies directly with the degree of importance attached to and the definiteness of the transitional procedures used by the society in designating the changes in role..."\textsuperscript{2}

The application of these propositions would yield a large amount of information on an individual's adjustment and maladjustment to social roles and the determinants that are operating in preventing social adjustment. However, what is still needed is the ability to put these propositions into appropriate question form by researchers skilled in measurement systems and social role theory.

\textsuperscript{1}Cottrell, Leonard S., Jr., The Adjustment of the Individual to His Age and Sex Roles," \textit{American Sociological Review}, 7, 1942, 619 and 620.

\textsuperscript{2}loc. cit., 618 and 619.
Summary

Literature in the area of role ambiguity was presented as a function of a communication and social learning model. Role ambiguity can be detected by the observations of individuals, both verbally and non-verbally, during interaction with other members in the same social position (e.g., focal person with role senders). Three coping mechanisms were presented that are open to focal persons in a conflict or ambiguous position. (1) Aggressive action or communication to role senders. (2) Avoidance or rejection of difficult demands. And (3) Direct approach to role senders leading to increased effective communication.

Research literature was also presented to indicate the significance of poor clarity of role expectations of college women in adult roles. The concept of gaining clarity within a role was discussed through a learning model.

Finally, several propositions for social adjustment were stated. The ability to put these propositions into questions would develop a means of collecting data on individual adjustment or maladjustment to culturally established roles. This assessment measure would be applicable not only to age and sex roles but to any role that can be defined as existing within the social structure.
CHAPTER VI

A FORMAL PROPOSAL FOR CONTINUED RESEARCH

The Purpose

It seems fitting to conclude this thesis with a formal research proposal. The research surveyed in this thesis has indicated the need of developing an assessment measure of role conflict, role strain, and role ambiguity which can be applied to client populations. Until a valid measurement system is scientifically proven, the social concept theories will remain only hypothetical ideas which cannot help the people who could benefit from their application.

Social functioning theory is investigating the delineation of individual role performance in order to determine the degree of functioning. Since the research has established the existence of role conflict, role strain, and role ambiguity, we now need to determine the degree of intensity which exist in different populations. The purpose of this proposal is to present a measurement design which will clarify the intensity of role conflict, role strain, and role ambiguity in clients being treated in mental health facilities as compared to a socially defined 'normal' population.
The Research Proposal

Statement of the Problem

Research studies in the area of social role theory have focused primarily around the accumulation of data to support theoretical concepts. Specifically, the concepts are role, role performance, expectations, conflict, strain and ambiguity. Social role theory has established that through the interaction of people in the performance of their roles, difficulties will be experienced by the individual. These experienced difficulties will be manifested in terms of role conflict, role strain, and role ambiguity.

The three areas will be defined as, "role ambiguity is the lack of clarity of role expectations about the rights and duties of a given position. Role conflict is the opposition of role expectations for a position such that a position member cannot perform in terms of all of them. Role strain is the experienced difficulty of a position member performing in that position."¹

The problem that this proposal addresses is: to what degree do role ambiguity, role conflict, and role strain, manifest themselves in a client population as compared to a non-client

population? Is there a significant difference in intensity in one, two, or all three of these areas?

Review of the literature

The review of literature has been provided in Chapters II-V. Briefly what needs to be stated is that there has been evidence given that the concepts of role ambiguity, role conflict, and role strain, are a function of the interaction of people and the performance of their roles.

John T. Cullahorn and Allvar Jackobson have provided research studies that have attempted to measure role conflict. Arnold M. Rose has attempted to measure role ambiguity. Leonard S. Cottrell has provided twelve propositions that may be developed into questions which would establish the clarity of a role. The area of role strain has not been formulated into any kind of measurement. At this time, role strain, is a theoretical concept which needs to be tested. William J. Goode and J. Diedrick Snock have provided evidence which supports the existence of role strain in individual role performance. Edwin J. Thomas and Ronald A. Feldman have defined role ambiguity, role conflict, and role strain, and their definitions will be used as guidelines for the terminology used in this proposal.

Hypothesis

Clients being treated in a community mental health center for
psychological disorders will rate statements designed to determine
the intensity of role conflict, role strain, and role ambiguity
in five social role areas as significantly more intense for
each of the five roles as well as their total social role than
a matched control group of people selected from a population that
does not have a history of being treated for mental disorders.

**Instrumentation**

A questionnaire will be developed so that the statements will
be applications of the definitions given by Thomas and Feldman on
role conflict, role strain, and role ambiguity. They will be
phrased in terms of these three concepts. Each statement will
be ranked in terms of no intensity to very high degrees of
intensity on a scale of 0 to 5 by the subject. A statement
ranked at zero (0) will indicate no intensity, one (1) will be
minimal intensity, two (2) will be below average intensity,
three (3) will be average intensity, four (4) above average
intensity, and five (5) will be extreme intensity.

The statements will be arranged so that they pertain to
five social role areas. The role areas that will be used
are: parent role, spouse role, work role, domestic role, and
student role. A brief description of these roles will be pro-
vided and a series of thirty (30) statements will follow. The
statements will be arranged so that ten will pertain to role
conflict, ten to role ambiguity, and ten to role strain, in each
of the five social role areas. The respondents will only rate
those statements that pertain to roles that they are now performing.

Information on how the statements should be phrased and specific areas they should deal with in the five role areas will be compiled from lists of examples that have been obtained through interviews with several psychologists who have specialized in dealing with people having problems in a certain role. A list of examples will be made on the student role from an interview with school psychologists, work role on interviews with industrial psychologists, spouse role from a marriage counselor, parent and domestic role from a family therapist.

The interview-questionnaire procedure will be used in this study so that the independent variables of interviewer and test situation can be maintained at a constant level. This would allow for the clarification of the meanings of each social role area and statements that the respondent may be having difficulty in understanding. This procedure will allow for direct observation by the interviewer of each response as well as the recorded response. There will be numerical values given to each of the statements which will allow for statistical analysis. Since this is a unique study there is no way, at this time, to determine validity and reliability of the measurement instrument. It is hoped that through a re-test of this design with two unique groups of subjects in a similar situation that the validity and reliability will be established.


**Sampling**

Two groups of 25 subjects will be selected for the test procedure.

The experimental group will consist of 25 clients being treated at a local community mental health center. Information will be gathered on the client's age, sex, marital status, number of children, and employment through a review of their intake profile. When the data on the experimental group is completed, this information will be used in selecting 25 subjects in the control group so that the dependent variables of age, sex, marital status, number of children, and employment can be matched to the experimental group. The control group will differ from the experimental group in that they will be selected from a population having no previous history of mental disorders.

The actual procedure in developing the control group will be to write a letter to every 75th person selected from a local telephone book. The letter will explain the nature of this study and information will be requested concerning age, sex, marital status, number of children, employment, and past history of any mental disorders. From those people who voluntarily respond, 25 subjects will be selected matching the information.

Those selected subjects will be contacted and informed that they will participate in this study. They will be asked to set aside one hour of time to be interviewed at an office which will be rented from a local business firm (this will act to maintain...
a neutral test environment for all the subjects participating in the study) within the next three weeks.

If the original subjects would fail to take part in the study the previous procedure would be used to find replacements.

Design

Social role theory has established three areas in which individuals experience difficulty. Research seems to indicate that role conflict, role strain, and role ambiguity are present in normal and client populations. However the degree to which they exist has not been established. This study hypothesizes that these three areas will exist in a significantly higher degree with subjects taken from a client population than those subjects taken from a normal population. This result should be evident in their total degree of intensity as well as the degree of intensity at the five levels of role performance (e.g., spouse, parent, domestic, work, student).

Figure 1 indicates that role conflict, role ambiguity, and role strain are all subsets of social role theory. These three areas have now been defined clearly enough to make them applicable to normal and client populations. This research study will use the definitions of Thomas and Feldman on role conflict, role ambiguity and role strain, to compare the intensity of these three areas in five social roles as well as the total intensity between samples taken from client and normal populations. The interview will be the means of collecting information
FIGURE I. Paradigm of the Research Design
Paradigm of the Research Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Role Theory</th>
<th>Role Conflict</th>
<th>Role Strain</th>
<th>Role Ambiguity</th>
<th>Role Concepts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
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<tr>
<th>Role Strain in Normal Sample</th>
<th>Role Strain in Client Sample</th>
<th>Role Conflict in Client Sample</th>
<th>Role Conflict in Normal Sample</th>
<th>Role Ambiguity in Normal Sample</th>
<th>Role Ambiguity in Client Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spouse Role Percent of Intensity</td>
<td>Parent Role Percent of Intensity</td>
<td>Domestic Role Percent of Intensity</td>
<td>Work Role Percent of Intensity</td>
<td>Student Role Percent of Intensity</td>
<td>Total Percent Of Intensity Normal Sample</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Normal Sample</th>
<th>Client Sample</th>
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<tr>
<td>Role Strain</td>
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<td>Role Conflict</td>
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<td>Role Ambiguity</td>
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which will lead to a clear statistical result that can be easily interpreted.

In the interview itself, the six degrees of intensity will be explained to each of the subjects. A card will also be given to the subject that lists the six responses along with an explanation of their value. They will be asked to verbally rate each of the statements read to them by the interviewer using one of the six response choices. The interviewer will then circle the response to the statement on a numerical tally sheet ranging from 0 to 5. When a new social role category is introduced, the interviewer will provide an explanation to the subject of what the role category means, i.e., spouse role, "the following statements will deal with your relationship with your husband or wife." This process will continue until the interview is completed.

Data Collection and Statistical Analysis

The data will be collected from the individual tally sheets made at the time of the interview. The data will be broken down into thirty (30) groups. For example, those statements dealing with role conflict in the spouse role for the normal sample, those statements dealing with role conflict for the client sample, those statements dealing with role strain in the spouse role for the normal sample, those statements dealing with role strain in the spouse role for the client sample, those
statements dealing with role ambiguity in the spouse role for the normal sample, those statements dealing with role conflict in the spouse role for the client sample, and so on.

The percentage of intensity for each of the thirty units will be calculated from the data pertaining to each of the categories. For example, all statements dealing with role conflict in the spouse role for the normal sample.

First, each individual percentage of intensity will be calculated for role conflict, role ambiguity, and role strain for each of the five (5) individual role areas. The formula for calculating the percentage will be dividing the total individual numerical responses (x) by the total possible individual responses (50) and multiplying by one hundred (100).

\[ \frac{x}{50} \times 100 = \text{Total individual } \% \text{ of intensity.} \]

The mean of these twenty-five (25) individual percentages will be found by taking the sum of the individual percentages (x) and dividing by the total number of subjects (25).

\[ \frac{x}{25} = \text{mean } \% \text{ of intensity} \]

This mean will equal the percent of intensity for each of the thirty (30) categories on the paradigm.

In order to obtain the total percent of intensity for the client and normal sample for role conflict, role strain, and role ambiguity, the mean percentages of each of the five (5) individual
role categories will be calculated by dividing the sum of the percentages of the five categories (x) by the total number of categories (5) in each of the three (3) major areas and multiplying by one hundred (100).

\[
\frac{x}{5} \times 100 = \text{Total } \% \text{ of intensity.}
\]

We can now have statistics by which we can compare the intensity of role strain, role conflict, and role ambiguity in the five categories as well as the total percent of intensity of role strain, role conflict, and role ambiguity for the client sample and the normal sample.

Significance

To predict the possible percentages of intensity would at this time be mere conjecture since the researcher has found no previous studies of this type to base his conjecture on. However, the differences would be evaluated by Chi Square Contingency Tables using the conventional levels of confidence. If significant differences were found, this would also seem to indicate that further investigation into this area would establish the validity and reliability of the measurement instrument.

The major significance of this entire research project would be that it would extend the knowledge of social role theory from a position of theoretical concepts into a position of applicability that can be used to determine the causal factors leading to
inappropriate role performance. It could also lead to a program of counseling which will be organized around specific disorders; instead of the general procedures that are now applied to the many types of role disorders.
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