Social Role

Department of Sociology,

Post Graduate Government College For Girls,

Sector-11,Chandigarh

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The term Social Role was borrowed by social scientists originally from the Greek drama where the word role was used in the sense of playing a character in the theatre performance. The word "role" has been Derived from the Latin word "Rotula" which means "a little wheel". Since then, it has been differently used by social anthropologists and sociologists.

Meanings and Definitions

Robert Bierstedt defines role as "the dynamic or the behavioral aspect of the status. A role is what an individual does in the status he occupies."

Duncan Mitchell writes that "a social role is the expected behaviour associated with a social position."

A social role, thus, is a set of social norms that govern a person's behaviour in a group and determines his relationships with other group members.

The Concept of Role

Individuals in a society behave according to a certain patterns of behaviour. These standard patterns are determined by social positions or the statuses which the individual occupies in society because it is these social positions which lay down norms by indicating which individual should observe which norms.

One plays as many roles as he has statuses. A given man may both concurrently and sequentially enact the roles of husband, father, breadwinner, football fan. Social roles may be likened to blue prints for behaviour that are handed to the individual, hypothetically, when he becomes a member of the group. As such, these constitute the group expectations concerning how one should behave.

Characteristics of Role

•In any interaction situation, roles are found to possess internal consistency as facilitated by individual adjustment and group efficiency.

•Feasibility of enactment by one individual is another characteristic of role.

•In any interaction situation, the meaning of individual action for ego the actor and for any alter partners in interaction is assigned on the basis of the imputed role.

•It is the emergence and identification of ego and other roles that contributes to the persistence of interaction. Each role tends to form a comprehensive way of coping with one or more relevant alter roles.

•As the roles get themselves stabilized, they are assigned the characters of legitimate expectations.

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                    ROLE



Role Prescription   Role Description   Role Evaluation
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Role Prescription

This refers to rules determining who can acquire a role and what type of training is needed for that role. Robert. K. Merton talks about a role set rather than a role. A role set refers to roles that are ties together in such a way that one must be played in interaction with another.

Role Description

It refers to the requirements of the activities which are socially approved and associated with a specific position.

Role Evaluation

This refers to the social judgement of role performance.

Role Taking

In the role analysis, the concept of role has assumed importance Role taking means that a person responds by putting himself mentally or imaginatively in the role of the other person in order to regulate his own behavior. Role taking is significant in the process of socializations. Idea of role taking is fundamental to the theory of social cells established by the social psychologist G.H. Mead.

Role Conflict

Role conflict refers to the conflict experienced by the individual at the time of role playing .This may be experienced by the individual at two levels:

- Within its own body of roles
- Between his own roles and those of other actors.

Sources of Role Conflict

- A person may experience distaste for roles that are uncongenial to his or her personality.

- There may be ambiguity within the society concerning the requirements of a given role.

- Role conflict may occur when a person occupies two or more social positions.

- Role conflict occurs when more norms than one are attached and the individual fins it difficult to follow all the norms.

- Conflict occurs when there is rapid change in the environment.

Techniques of resolving Role Conflicts

- Scheduling or allocating times and places to attend each role.
- Assigning priorities or establishing an order of importance as a standard for deciding between competing roles.
- Role reduction or deliberately shrinking some responsibilities to attend to others more adequately.
- Role cancellation or renouncing one or more roles.

Role Failure

- Role failure can occur in both inter group and intra group relations.
- It results in mental or physical illness.
- Sometimes it gives rise to delinquency and crime.

Relationship between Status and Role

•A status is simply a position in society or in a group. A role is a behavioral aspect of status. Statuses are occupied and roles are played.

•Role is a relational term.

•Role and status in a way point out the divergent interests of the two sciences-social psychology and sociology.

•Both status and role are dynamic and constantly changing.