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American Journal of Sociology, Volume 84, Issue 1 (Jul., 1978), 1-23.

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American Journal of Sociology
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The Role and the Person¹

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As a complement to the familiar idea of self-conception, the concept of role-person merger is proposed as a more behavioral approach to understanding the social construction of personality than has been taken previously. Person and role are said to be merged when there is a systematic pattern involving failure of role compartmentalization, resistance to abandoning a role in the face of advantageous alternative roles, and the acquisition of role-appropriate attitudes. Three principles concerning appearance, effect, and consistency provide the basis for a series of propositions concerning interactive determinants of merger. Three other principles—consensual frames of reference, autonomy and favorable evaluation, and investment—provide the basis for propositions concerning individual determinants of role-person merger.

By each individual, some roles are put on and taken off like clothing without lasting personal effect. Other roles are difficult to put aside when a situation is changed and continue to color the way in which many of the individual's roles are performed. The question is not whether the role is played well or poorly or whether it is played with zest or quite casually. Role embracement (Goffman 1961*b*, p. 106) can coexist with strict role compartmentalization. An accomplished thespian can give himself unreservedly to a role and take great pride in producing a convincing portrayal of the part but return to being a very different kind of person when the play is over. The question is whether the attitudes and behavior developed as an expression of one role carry over into other situations. To the extent that they do, we shall speak of a merger of role with person.

Many of the discrepancies between role prescription and role behavior in organizations can be explained by the individual's inability to shed roles that are grounded in other settings and other stages of the life cycle. Merger of role with person is often the source of role conflict, as Killian (1952) demonstrated for emergency workers whose more deeply merged family roles infringed on the performance of their rescue roles in a disaster situation. When a role is deeply merged with the person, socialization in that role has pervasive effects in personality formation. When there is little

¹I am grateful for support from the National Institute of Mental Health (grants USPHS MH 16505 and MH 26243) and comments from Steve Gordon, Sheldon Mesinger, Jerald Schutte, Stephen Spitzer, Thomas Tyler, and Lewis Zurcher.

or no merger, role-socialization effects remain strictly compartmentalized.

The observation that there are differences in the extent to which role and person are merged supplies a useful point of departure for a wide-ranging examination of the relationship between role and person. The aim of this paper is to develop that approach by suggesting some of the conditions that should determine whether a role will be merged with the person of the role incumbent or will be evoked only when the situation dictates.

THE NATURE OF ROLE-PERSON MERGER

The Concept of Person

Most investigations in psychologistic view of related to role allocations in looking for the "fashioning effects" (Carl Backman and Paul Secord, in Gordon and Gergen 1968, pp. 289-96) of role on personality, "role selection" (Thomas 1968) in harmony with personality, and "self-role congruence" (Sarbin and Allen 1968). But the traditional concept of a *person* as "a human being who has acquired status and engages in social interaction" (Hoult 1969, p. 237) is amenable to formulation in terms that relate more meaningfully to social structure. In the broadest sense the person consists of all the roles in an individual's repertoire, with some qualification about how well each is played. But in keeping with the analogy of stage role playing, sociologists are reluctant to infer anything about the person of the actor merely from the nature of the roles that are played well or poorly. Role repertoires are organized into hierarchies. The person is best described in terms of the roles that are still played when not called for and that color the way in which other roles are played.

The idea of person is related to the ideas of self and identity, and merger of role and person is related to identification with a role. Two differences from these concepts are important, however. First, identity can be strictly situational, and identification with a role is often used to indicate the quality of situational involvement in a role (Nye 1976, p. 23). Although the terms "self" and "self-conception" are usually reserved for an object that resists strict compartmentalization by role-defining situation, this is not always the case. Second, the ideas of self and identity are generally conceived subjectively, according to the arousal of self-feeling. Kuhn's Twenty Statements Test (Kuhn 1954; Spitzer, Couch, and Stratton 1970) relies on the personal experience of self-feeling as the basis for subjects' enumerating components of the self-conception. Jack Preiss (in

Gordon and Gergen 1968, pp. 207-18) explores the emergence of a professional self-image by asking medical students when they expect to feel like physicians. This approach has been and will continue to be important, but it has limitations. Reports of self-feeling are more difficult to verify than reports of behavior and are probably less reliable. People often report self-feeling in fleeting and atypical roles and situations, which are plainly not the major anchorages for person or personality. Perhaps it is because of this reliance on reported self-feeling that the self-conception has been a less fruitful predictor of behavior in empirical research than was anticipated (Wylie 1968; Spitzer et al. 1970).

The idea of role-person merger is offered as a more behavioral complement to the subjective idea of self-conception. Careful study of the correspondence and discrepancy between self-feeling and role-person merger should enhance our understanding of the person as social product.

Criteria of Role-Person Merger

Three principal criteria are suggested for use in empirical studies of role-person merger. The first is failure of role compartmentalization: a subject can continue to play a role in situations where the role does not apply. In the motion picture *A Double Life*, Ronald Coleman depicted an actor whose obsession with the stage role of Othello led him to act out the role in his private life offstage. Strodtbeck and Mann's (1956) demonstration that interaction in experimental jury panels is pervasively affected by the sex of the jurors suggests that sex roles are deeply merged with the persons of many of the experimental subjects. The professional who carries the office bearing and air of authority into family and community dealings has *become* to a considerable degree the professional role played at work.

A second criterion is similar in principle to the first: one resists abandoning a role despite available, advantageous, and viable alternative roles. When "class consciousness" is intense, a laborer may be emotionally unable to accept proffered advancement to a supervisory spot. A craftsman in a declining occupation may be unable to face the possibility of shifting to a skill that is in greater demand. The academic person par excellence rejects promotion to a more highly paid and prestigious administrative post as a betrayal of commitment to the academic role. The retired worker who keeps returning to the office and giving advice to younger workers has been unable to divorce the role from his person.

A third way to recognize salience and resistance to compartmentalization is to examine the attitudes and beliefs that a person holds. Merger of role with person is indicated by the acquisition of attitudes and beliefs appropriate to the role. Lieberman's (1950) demonstration that industrial

workers promoted to foremen came to hold more promanagement attitudes than they did before promotion indicates at least a modest merger of the role of foreman with the person. The traditional sociological concern with "occupational attitudes" (Bogardus 1927) has been an effort to understand how the occupational role defies compartmentalization in supplying a personal orientation in varied situations.

A fourth but less conclusive criterion also exists: the experience of learning a role or putting it into practice. It is more difficult to state this criterion in simple terms for several reasons. (*a*) Sometimes the merger occurs simultaneously with learning or executing the role and sometimes only after the role has been played for a period of time. (*b*) Sometimes role-allocation processes bring the role and actor together on the basis of a preexisting congeniality—that is, personal predispositions that suit the individual to the role. And (*c*) varying degrees of anticipatory socialization precede allocation, adoption, and enactment of a role.

When there is no merger with the person, adding a new role to one's repertoire is generally a simple matter of learning how to enact the role. But when the new role is being fitted into the personal hierarchy, there is normally some personal disruption and reorganization. Hence the process of learning and adopting a role that is also being merged into the person is usually more tumultuous than learning a role that is merely a situational resource. There is a paradox here: transition into a role with pervasive significance for personal behavior can often be a stressful experience. Marrying, joining a church, and assuming an office of public trust can all be more difficult steps for persons who do not compartmentalize these roles than for those who do.

Determinants of Merger

To some extent the merger of role and person is imposed on the individual in the course of social interaction. The individual is partially constrained to be the person who corresponds to the assumptions that others are making about him. But unlike role allocation, role-person merger requires more than external compliance with social pressures. Hence individual determinants also require careful attention. I discuss interactive determinants of merger first, then individual determinants. I begin each of these sections by asking what functions are served for alter and ego by the concept of person, and next I suggest some guiding principles governing the selective merger of role and person, consistent with the functions identified. Then I list propositions inferred from the guiding principles. These sections are followed by a brief discussion of articulation between the two sets of determinants.

INTERACTIVE DETERMINANTS OF MERGER

Interactive Functions of Role-Person Merger

In order to hypothesize about *when* there will be a merger of role with person we must first ask *why* the attitudes and behavior that express one role should be experienced in situations where other roles are more obviously relevant. Why should people make the assumption that there is something called a person who is more real than the visible role-playing actor? Following the classic functional approach (Dewey 1922; Malinowski 1945), I assume that alters employ a conception of ego as person, based on what they see in one or more of ego's roles, when being able to conceive of a person is useful to them in their interaction. Understanding the utility of being able to interact with a putative person rather than a mere role incumbent should supply the primary clues to when the role will and will not be equated with the person.

When the same people interact only within a single role complement, questions sometimes arise that can be answered more adequately by assuming the existence of a person behind the actor than without that assumption. Two questions in particular pertain to such situations: (a) Will the same role allocations apply in successive interaction episodes, or will it be necessary to reestablish who is playing which role on each occasion? (b) Can the actors be depended upon to carry out the implied and expressed commitments of their roles? In each instance, postulating a person more fundamental and continuous than the actor helps in finding answers to the questions. If the role has become a significant part of the person, reallocation at the actor's initiative is unlikely, and commitments will probably be honored. It simplifies matters for everyone if this assumption can be made.

The idea of person becomes more significant when the individual is viewed as the incumbent of different roles in various settings. Here the utility of the idea of person lies in facilitating answers to two other questions: (c) Which role will govern the individual's orientation in the not infrequent instances when the boundaries between settings are not airtight? (d) What role will govern the individual's orientation in situations that are undefined, occurring outside plainly marked institutional settings?

All four of these questions are material to the processes of social control and to the judgments of credit and responsibility that enter into decisions on whether to apply control techniques or not (Ralph H. Turner, in Gordon and Gergen 1968, pp. 93-106). Social control, to be effective and lasting, requires a less ephemeral object than the actor playing a particular role. Hence the concept of person is shaped to a great degree in the service of social control.

Interactive Principles

Appearance principle.—The concept of person is a simplifying assumption, and recurrent interaction in the same roles is simplified when participants can assume that the roles correctly reveal the persons involved. If we assume an economy-of-effort principle—people tend to act on the basis of the simplest assumptions that seem to work for them—it is reasonable to suppose that most interaction proceeds on the basis of appearances. The appearance principle can be stated as follows: in the absence of contradictory cues, people tend to accept others as they appear. This means that people tend to conceive another person on the basis of the role behavior they observe unless there are cues that alert them to the possibility of a discrepancy between person and role.

This may seem a surprising assumption in the light of prevalent concern with lack of trust, insincerity, and calculating role performance. But attribution theorists constantly find a strong tendency to attribute the cause of behavior to the person, even when the observed behavior is expressive of a strictly delineated role (Jones et al. 1972). And the impressionistic evidence is considerable. We take for granted that people who frighten us are aggressive, that people who kill or steal are murderers or robbers in more than a situational sense, that people who stop and render aid are kind, that people who give gifts are generous.

Effect principle.—A natural extension of the functionalist logic is the observation that we pay closest attention when our own fate and course of action are at stake. If the assumption of the existence of a person behind the actor facilitates interaction, the need for that assumption will be greatest when the potential effect of the interaction on the interactants is greatest. Accordingly the disposition to conceive people on the basis of their role behavior will vary directly with the potential effect of the role on alter.

Consistency principle.—As a simplifying assumption, the idea of person depends upon positing some individual consistency over time and among situations. People are disposed, in the absence of strong contradictory indications, to accept the most obvious and least complicated view of the person that facilitates interaction. Accordingly people should view a particular role enactment as accurately revealing the person when doing so adds to a consistent picture of the person and should distinguish between role and person when failure to do so imports inconsistencies into the image.

Interactive Propositions

Role and person in a single role complement.—The simplest situation is that in which ego and the social circle (Znaniecki 1965) of alters interact

in only one set of relationships (i.e., one role complement). Four propositions relevant to such situations are suggested on the basis of the appearance principle.

1. The more inflexible the allocation of actors to a role, the greater the tendency for members of the social circle to conceive the person as revealed by the role. People are most likely to see the role as the person when they have no opportunity to see the actor in alternative or contradictory roles. Astonishment over the unprepossessing but thoroughly reliable bank clerk who acts the hero during a bank robbery, or the one who is exposed as an embezzler, allows us to appreciate how much we take for granted that the role *is* the person when we have seen the individual in only one role. In contrast, when we see people regularly in alternative or contradictory roles, we are sensitized to the distinction between person and role and inhibited from making our usual automatic assumptions about the person behind the role. When role allocations in any situation or group of people are unstable, so that people readily exchange roles in the course of interaction or between episodes of interaction, there can be little disposition to confuse role with person. But when the same actors play the same roles in successive interaction episodes, people increasingly assume that role-related attitudes will be expressed in other situations and take for granted that they express the personal orientations of the actors.

Many conditions affect the rigidity of role allocations. One of these is the existence of conflict. Conflict accentuates the demand for loyalty and secrecy. Allocation to roles that are in mutual conflict tends to be relatively inflexible once the initial role allocations have been made. Hence a derivative proposition: (1a) The more conflictual the relationship between roles, the greater the tendency for members of the social circle to conceive the person as revealed by the role.

2. The more comprehensively and strictly differentiated the role, the greater the tendency for members of the social circle to conceive the person as revealed by the role. When differentiation is slight, there is a great deal of role overlap, so that many of the group tasks or characteristic attitudes are shared by incumbents of different roles. In one family unit, man's work and woman's work are quite distinct, while in another family unit husband and wife share most of the home responsibilities and differ very little in most of their characteristic attitudes and sentiments. From the appearance principle, it follows that a system of highly differentiated roles displays readily distinguishable patterns of performance, and consequently the roles seem to tell a great deal about the role incumbents. When roles are only weakly differentiated, the patterns of behavior are only peripherally distinguishable, and the roles seem to say little about the persons.

3. The higher and more consistent the judgments of role adequacy, the greater the tendency for members of the social circle to conceive the person as revealed by the role. Poor playing of a role suggests that the role is not a good clue to the person. At the same time, role adequacy does not necessarily imply a positive judgment. If the role is negatively valued, high role adequacy may bring even more unfavorable judgment than low adequacy. Just as the highly effective lawyer, craftsman, or parent is most likely to be regarded and treated as if the role were the person, so the "successful" criminal is more often viewed as being a criminal at heart than the unsuccessful felon.

Judgments of role adequacy carry less weight when the role is easy than they do when the role is difficult. Even a judgment of quite high adequacy for an easy role may not be viewed as telling a great deal about the person. Hence a contingency proposition: (3a) The more difficult the role is thought to be, the stronger the relationship between judgments of role adequacy and the tendency for members of the social circle to conceive the person as revealed by the role.

4. The more polar the evaluation of a role as favorable or unfavorable, the greater the tendency for members of the social circle to conceive the person as revealed by the role. Roles that are quite positively evaluated and those that are quite negatively evaluated attract more attention than neutral roles. Because appearances are more striking, inferences about the person are likely to be stronger. Very positively valued roles are also usually thought to be fairly difficult to perform well. The same is true of very negatively valued roles, because of the assumption that most people are held somewhat in check by mores and values of the group and society. There is also a riskiness about switching role allocations when the roles are strongly valued either positively or negatively that contributes to inflexible allocations.

The effect principle suggests three propositions applicable to interaction in a single role complement:

5. The greater the potential power and discretion vested in a role, the greater the tendency for members of the social circle to conceive the person as revealed by the role. This proposition needs no comment.

6. The greater the extent to which members of a social circle are bonded to role incumbents by ties of identification, the greater the tendency for them to conceive the person as revealed by the role.

7. The more intimate the role relationship among actors and social circle, the greater the tendency for members of the social circle to conceive the person as revealed by the role. These two propositions deal with qualitative differences in the power of role incumbents over their role alters. Personal followings depend heavily on identification: the followers experience the

successes and setbacks of their leader as if they were happening to themselves. Vicariously feeling the leader's elation and depression, the identifier can hardly admit the possibility that the leader is someone different from the person seen in the leader role. Identification is the typical relationship of followers with their leader and also of individuals in many relationships of admiration and dependence, such as that of child with parent.

A relationship of intimacy requires that customary defenses be dropped—that usual boundaries of self-disclosure be abandoned. The person whose role involves intimate revelations, such as the counselee, reveals aspects of behavior, attitude, and sentiment that could be quite damaging if the counselor were to betray the trust and pass on the revelations. Accordingly it is nearly impossible to remain in such a relationship unless the counselee assumes that the counselor displayed in the role corresponds to the person.

Role and person in multiple settings.—The distinction between person and role becomes more critical for social interaction when social circles overlap so that people may interact with each other in different role complements according to the demands of the situation. The community structure organizes the relationships among sectors, establishing that certain classes of roles will be the key roles (Hiller 1947, p. 339), whose significance transcends the boundaries of the role-specific situations. The person-defining body then ceases to be the circle for a specific role and becomes the community. Here again, four propositions are inferred from the appearance principle.

8. The broader the setting in which a role is lodged, the greater the tendency for members of the community to conceive the person as revealed by the role. Roles vary from an office held in a little-known club to age and sex roles that overlap the major institutional sectors of society. Between the extremes are roles lodged in broad institutional sectors, such as occupational and family roles. Since roles lodged in broader settings are more widely and frequently visible, they should more often be accepted as clues to the persons. Sex roles do indeed seem to afford confirmation for such an inference. Probably no assumption has been more generally and uncritically made than that men and women really are different—that they are not merely playing roles. Likewise, research has often confirmed that sex is one of the most powerful correlates of a wide range of attitude differences. Similarly, assumptions about the age-specific personal characteristics and dispositions of children, adolescents, adults, the middle aged, and the elderly are rarely questioned.

9. The more representative or external a role in relationship to its role system, the greater the tendency for members of the community to conceive the person as revealed by the role. A distinction has been made between internal and external roles. The external or group representative roles

(Parsons 1951, p. 100) are concerned with relations of the group and its members to other individuals and groups. These roles are especially visible to an audience outside the organization, thus considerably extending the basis for identifying the individual with the role.

10. The more conspicuous and widely recognizable the role cues, the greater the tendency for community members to conceive the person as revealed by the role. Roles are recognized by means of role cues or role signs (Banton 1965), which can be either relatively conspicuous and easily recognized or hidden and recognizable only to insiders. Uniforms, entourages, badges, hair styles, clothing styles, and distinctive speech patterns are among the conspicuous role signs. These signs extend the association between the role and individual beyond group boundaries, lend credibility and emphasis to the role allocation, and reduce ambiguity. Accordingly, in the absence of counterindications, they should accentuate the tendency to view the person through the role.

11. The more a role exemplifies the goals and nature of the group or organization in which it is lodged, the greater the tendency for community members to conceive the person as revealed by the role. In the context of multiple settings for roles, there are two distinct sources of information about any role incumbent. One is the role and the other is the nature of the setting or group. Certain roles in groups can be called exemplary because they exemplify the goals, the values, or the nature of the organization or group in some way. The architect exemplifies the architectural firm more than the janitor or accountant in the same company; the pastor exemplifies the church; the teacher exemplifies the educational institution more than the registrar does. In these cases the two sets of information—role and group membership—are mutually reinforcing. Accordingly, we infer that the incumbent of the exemplary role will more often be identified as a person through the role than will the incumbents of roles that do not exemplify the group.

Two closely related propositions concerning multiple settings are suggested by the effect principle:

12. The greater the extent to which a role in one setting determines allocation and performance of roles in other settings, the greater the tendency for members of the community to conceive the person as revealed by the role. If there has been a tendency to look for clues to a woman's personality through her family roles but to uncover a man's personality in his work role, it may be partly because the work role has traditionally been a precondition for the man's family role but not for the woman's family role. Banton's (1965) distinctions among basic, general, and independent roles suggest a continuum from basic roles that determine the individual's eligibility for many role allocations, to independent roles that

have no implications for other roles. There is a great deal of overlap between this dimension and the breadth of setting in which a role is lodged. But the dependence of one role on another goes beyond any general classification of roles along the basic-independent dimension, as the illustration of men's and women's work roles indicates.

13. The greater the extent to which the allocation to a role in an organization precludes incumbency or restricts the performance of roles in other settings, the greater the tendency for community members to conceive the person as revealed by the role. Total institutions (Goffman 1961*a*) and greedy institutions (Cosser 1974) deny the individual alternate settings in which to display personal characteristics at variance from those expressed through performance of a role in the institution. For inmates there is an almost inescapable merger between inmate role and person in the eyes of the community.

The consistency principle is the source of two further propositions:

14. The greater the extent to which a role is viewed as appropriate to and dependent on the actor's more broadly based roles, the greater the tendency for members of the community to conceive the person as revealed by the role. In spite of the tendency for the most broadly based roles to serve as determiners of eligibility for less broadly based roles, individuals may still be found in roles that are not considered wholly consistent with or appropriate for their broadly based roles. A man may be a nurse, although the female sex role is the usual precondition to the nurse role. In addition, there are roles whose allocation is unaffected by a broadly based role. Because the broadly based role is identified with the person, there is also a tendency to see any role for which it qualifies the person as being a natural extension of the broadly based role and consequently a source of further clues to a consistent view of the person behind the role. But when the less broadly based role is not in keeping with the broadly based role, it will often be discounted so as to avoid introducing inconsistencies into the image of the person derived from the broadly based role. By applying this observation, we can extend the illustration of women and men in occupational roles. Even a female head of household who must enter occupational life to support herself and her children has traditionally not been identified as a person through her occupational role. The male role makes a man eligible for most occupational roles, so these roles become extensions of the broadly based male role, and the man is assumed to be the person displayed in his occupational role. But the female role has not traditionally qualified women for most occupational roles, so these roles have not been viewed as extensions of the broadly based sex role and have not been seen as providing important clues to the woman's person. Similarly, a woman nurse has been more likely to be perceived as person through her occupational role than a woman in business

and a woman elementary school teacher more than a woman professor, if our inference is correct.

15. The more temporary the allocation to a role is understood as being, and the more discontinuous in content the role with respect to preceding and succeeding roles, the greater the tendency for community members not to conceive the person as revealed by the role. The idea of an exemptive or time-out role was first developed by Parsons (1951) in his discussion of the sick role. By qualifying for the sick role and accepting its obligations, one escapes both the judgment of low role adequacy or deviancy in the neglected roles and the inference that behavior in the role is a clue to the character of the person. Other exemptive roles include bereavement and, depending upon cultural values, drunkenness (MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969). Two features of these roles may be crucial. First, they are temporary, and the whole pattern of obligations and privileges is premised on their transitory nature. Gordon (1966) presents evidence that lasting impairment leads to a pattern different from the sick role. Second, these roles are not sought or voluntarily assumed.

A class of roles that is voluntarily assumed is similar in resisting merger with the person. The principal example here is the student role. Students have traditionally been granted considerable license and their foibles discounted as indications of their personal qualities. The student role differs from other preparatory roles in being discontinuous with respect to the ultimate role. Unlike the company assistant manager, whose role performance has only slightly less grave consequences than the manager's for co-workers and customers, the student is separated from the work setting, and his work is of no consequence to others except as a sign of his academic progress. We assume that the shift from medical student to hospital intern is a significant transition in this respect.

The exemptive and student roles have in common discontinuity and an explicitly temporary character. These characteristics in combination seem crucial for discounting the role as an index of the person. They also relate to appearance and effect over time.

INDIVIDUAL DETERMINANTS OF MERGER

Individual Functions of Role-Person Merger

It is a paradox of social interaction that, for an individual to understand, predict, and control others' behavior (except by force), he himself must be reasonably comprehensible and predictable to them. The easiest way to be comprehensible to others is to be the person they have constructed from one's roles. The first function of selective role-person merger for the individual is to establish a basis for understanding, predicting, and con-

trolling others by becoming reasonably understandable and predictable to them.

A second individual function of role-person merger is to economize effort when called on to play many roles. The probability of playing all our roles equally well is slight for most of us. But by exporting favored roles into marginally relevant situations, the individual can discount low adequacy in the displaced roles and need not work for mastery in any but the most significant roles. Similarly, if we assume that individuals seek to complete invested lines of action (Mead 1938), they can drop unfinished lines of action in their less involved roles.

Closely related is a third function of facilitating control and its obverse, autonomy. In the absence of a trans-situational anchorage, the actor is strictly a creature of each situation and the associated roles. Being able to draw upon an identity that transcends the situation gives the actor discretion and mutes the effect of many of the positive and negative sanctions that regulate the situationally indicated role enactment. In keeping with Waller and Hill's (1951) less-interest principle, the individual who is less exclusively involved in a role can often turn this to advantage over one who is fully involved.

A fourth function is to enable the individual to maximize favorable interaction. Some roles provide more gratification than others, either because the roles carry more rewards or because the individual is more proficient at them and better able to secure their rewards. If the individual can arrange to continue playing these roles in situations where other roles are indicated, he may escape some of the costs of the less gratifying roles.

A fifth function is to enable the individual to realize rewards commensurate with the investments made in particular roles. Investments in a role are often disproportionate to the strictly role-related rewards. The child who practices piano for months in preparation for a single recital and the mother who makes great sacrifices for an unappreciative child are examples of high investment for low return. Extrinsic rewards like money can be detached from the role for use in situations unrelated to the source role, but intrinsic rewards such as admiration of artistic virtuosity or filial devotion cannot. In the latter case, the individual may be able to supplement a meager reward by continuing to play the heavily invested roles in situations where the role is uncalled for.

Principles

Consensual frames of reference principle.—Individuals tend to merge into their persons those roles by which significant others identify them. This occurs because of the mutual understanding and control paradox already discussed, and because the cultural frames of reference that view

certain roles as key or person roles are learned and tend to be taken for granted by the individual.

Autonomy and favorable-evaluation principle.—The principle that the individual will tend to merge role and person selectively so as to maximize autonomy and positive self-evaluation stems directly from the corresponding functions.

Investment principle.—Following Homans (1961), investment has been an important concept in sociological theorizing as part of an exchange model of social behavior. The guiding assumption is that individuals will merge into the person those roles in which investment has been greatest or in which adequate return from investment is yet to be realized.

Individual Propositions

Several propositions are rather directly derivable from the principles just presented:

16. The more intensely and consistently significant others identify a person on the basis of a certain role, the greater the tendency for the individual to merge that role with his person.

17. The more actor-discretion incorporated in a role and the wider the range of settings in which the role behavior can be made meaningful, the greater the tendency for the individual to merge the role with his person.

18. Individuals tend to merge positively evaluated roles with their persons.

19. Individuals tend to locate their persons in the roles they enact most adequately. Some evidence in support of these last two propositions is found in Rosenberg's (1967) study of selectivity in self-esteem formation. Following Davis (1949), we shall call the evaluation derived from allocation to a role "prestige" and the evaluation based on the adequacy with which the role is enacted "esteem."

If a person's most prestigious role is also the one played best, it should be salient in the individual's role hierarchy. Likewise a low-prestige role that is played badly should be handled with considerable detachment. But most roles probably fall in the more interesting category marked by discrepancy. Propositions 18 and 19 will then yield contradictory predictions. Three preliminary suggestions will be offered concerning how people resolve such dilemmas.

First, persons fall on a continuum from unitary to divided. One solution to conflicting rewards is a sharply divided personal organization so that one can "be" whichever role provides the more favorable evaluation in the situation at hand. Mowrer (1935) described a life pattern of dual roles in which contradictions between roles never became an issue because the worlds in which they were enacted were totally segregated. (18-19a)

The less positive the correspondence between the prestige and the esteem derived from different roles in one's repertoire, the greater the tendency to divide the person between different roles in different situations.

The significance of role adequacy also depends greatly on the visibility of role performance or of evaluations of role performance. When criteria of role performance are vague or performance is not subject to public view and evaluation or effects of role performance are only assessable after long delay, role prestige will count much more heavily than esteem in the selective merger of role and person. (18-19*b*) The more visible and readily appraisable the role performance, the more the tendency to merge prestigious roles with the person will be modified by the tendency to merge roles that are played with high role adequacy with the person.

People live primarily within relatively restricted or wide social worlds. The distinction between locals and cosmopolitans (Merton 1957) suggests such a difference. In general, esteem based on role adequacy is accorded by the social circle of a specific role, while prestige is accorded by both the social circle and the larger community. Hence the relative importance of these two kinds of evaluation is affected by the scope of one's social world. (18-19*c*) The more the scope of an individual's social world exceeds the boundaries of the social circle for a given role, the more the merger between role and person is determined by the prestige rather than the esteem of the role.

20. The greater the investment of time and effort in gaining or maintaining the opportunity to claim a role or in learning to play a role, the greater the tendency to merge the role with the person.

21. The greater the sacrifices made in the course of gaining or maintaining the opportunity to claim a role, or in learning to play a role, the greater the tendency to merge the role with the person.

22. The more publicly a role is played and the more an individual has engaged in explaining and justifying a role and its standpoint, the greater the tendency to merge the role with the person. As this principle indicates, roles that involve socializing others to a role or enforcing adherence to role boundaries are especially likely to be merged with the person. For example, Lowe (1971) found that students who served as tutors in school played the student role more fully and intensely. It might be assumed that they would also have carried the role into other settings.

23. The greater the unresolved role strain, the greater the tendency to merge the role with the person. The effort and preoccupation required to cope with role strain constitute another type of investment. Traumatic conditions lead to persisting preoccupation that contaminates performance of other roles. Unresolved problems are difficult to let drop when the opportunity for change of roles comes along. Because an individual usually

tries to divest himself altogether of roles that are very costly, we are led to a paradoxical observation. The same role that would have been abandoned entirely at an early stage, had it been possible or had the costs been known, is the role most likely to become merged with the person at a later stage.

Assumptions underlying the last proposition are contradictory of the assumptions in some of Burr's (1972) propositions concerning ease of role transition. In his propositions 5 and 6 (pp. 410-11), Burr states that role strain facilitates movement out of a role and impedes movement into a role. The latter hypothesis is consistent with the present argument. But I believe the former overlooks two principles: (a) the amount of strain produced by low role adequacy is directly related to the extent of identification with that role, and (b) undergoing and coping with strain in a role is a way of investing in the role, making it more difficult, rather than easier, to shed it. For example, Waller (1930) and many after him have supplied case studies to illustrate how difficult it can be for people to adjust to divorce after a stormy marriage.

24. The more intrinsic the benefits derived from enacting a role the greater the tendency for the actor to merge the role with the person. The creative experience of writing or the aesthetic satisfaction of making music are benefits that can be realized only in the setting of role enactment. Actors, artists, craftsmen, writers, scientists, and scholars, whose intrinsic role benefits are especially prominent, often resist opportunities for favorable role reassignments. Extrinsic rewards are no less valued than intrinsic ones, and roles are sought no less for their extrinsic rewards. But the extrinsic return from personal investment is fully realizable without constant reenactment of the role or clinging to the role past the appropriate stage in the life cycle, so there is less impetus to merge role and person.

This proposition suggests a common basis for lack of articulation between the person-conception held by others and the personal organization, and for strict role compartmentalization. When intrinsic satisfactions come in a recreational role, the individual is more likely than the community to anchor the person in that role. People who turn their hobbies into vocations and women who translate intrinsically rewarding volunteer work into paid employment are often seeking to resolve this lack of articulation so as to gain community acceptance in keeping with the way they see themselves.

THE PROBLEM OF ARTICULATION

It is unlikely that hypotheses of the simple form listed for interactive and individual determinants of role-person merger can be formulated to describe the resolution between competing principles. Hence the discussion of

articulation will be limited to a few general points and some consideration of the process.

While the individual will often be socialized over an extended period of time into merging roles with his person selectively in conformity with the assumptions of significant others, there are at least two additional reasons for convergence. First, the appearance principle signifies a predisposition on the part of others to accept ego's presentation of his person. Thus convergence is facilitated by a two-way process in which the individual internalizes group conceptions and the group accepts what is apparent in the individual's behavior. Second, interactional and individual processes are often convergent in their operation. For example, personal investment in a role is probably correlated with rigidity of allocation, breadth of anchorage, and the extent to which one role is a qualifying role for access to other roles. Likewise, discretion in role enactment turns up as a correlate of role-person merger in the discussion of both interactional and individual determinants.

Nevertheless, convergence is imperfect, and the discrepancy will sometimes be great. Maximum convergence comes with continuity and integration of personal experience in a well-integrated society. Idiosyncratic socializing experiences and major changes in social setting increase the likelihood of discrepancy, with the marginal man (Park 1928) as a classic example. But we must adduce structural conditions in order to understand such widespread discrepancies as: frequent rejection of the community's presumption that the wife-and-mother role most fully reveals the woman as a person, the endemic effort to compartmentalize occupational roles, widespread resistance among the elderly to accepting an age role as personal anchorage, and disavowal of the implication of a deviant role for interaction in other roles.

If we assume an individual is pulled toward being the person others treat him as being, the question is what circumstances intensify or nullify such pressure. In discussing intrinsic role benefits, we noted that the individual might achieve convergence by shifting to a role that is similar in essential respects but includes the characteristics necessary for the community to identify the role with the person. The availability of suitable substitute roles is important in enabling individuals to resist pressures to change their personal role hierarchies.

The individual may hold on to a nonconvergent personal anchorage while complying with behavioral expectations if validation of personal anchorage is available from some reference group and if social circles are highly segregated. Overlapping social circles mean that interaction is often on a person-to-person rather than role-to-role basis, so discrepancies become problematic. Segregated social circles make interaction on a strictly role-

to-role basis more feasible. Social movements such as the women's movement support dissident personal anchorages, as do deviant communities. Mitchell (1966) describes a pattern of calculating role playing in prison, in which prisoners find mutual support for deceiving prison officials concerning the correspondence between prison roles and the person.

In a complex, loosely ordered society like our own, there are many possibilities for developing and maintaining a personal organization centered about roles that are not salient in the community's view of persons. But the potential strain is considerable and may help to explain uneasiness and unpredictability in role behavior.

In order to give sufficient emphasis to the active part played by the individual in the articulation process, it is tempting to borrow the concept of negotiation. Role allocating and role making are often accomplished through negotiation (Cicourel 1970). But negotiations deal principally with the visible currency of role behavior in delimited situations and in fairly brief episodes. The actor who is cast in a given role as the outcome of negotiation need not carry that role with him into other situations. The merger of role with person should be conceived more as a process of socialization, taking place over an extended period, building on the outcomes of many episodes in which role allocations are negotiated.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In concluding this discussion, I shall look briefly at the relationship between the approach used in this paper and attribution theory and call attention to some important unresolved problems.

Attribution Theory

"Attribution theory deals with the rules the average individual uses in attempting to infer the causes of observed behavior" (Jones et al. 1972, p. x). The preceding discussion of interactive determinants could be viewed as an examination of one class of popular attributions. Attribution theorists have concentrated their attention on external versus internal attributions of causation, which can often be translated into the question of whether the actor is merely playing a role (external) or whether the behavior and sentiments expressed through the role are those of the person (internal, with person and role merged). While the aim of attribution theory is to identify the causes and consequences of the cognitive phenomenon of causal attribution, my aim is to use causal attribution as one among several determiners of the behavioral phenomenon of role-person merger.

In principle, we should be able to incorporate hypotheses from attribution theory into the interactive determinants of role-person merger. For

example, evidence that role compliance by high-status persons is more frequently attributed to external causation than role compliance by low-status persons (Thibaut and Riecken 1955) is consistent with hypothesis 4 or 5, though the explanation is different. Thus far, however, attribution theorists have more often chosen variables for investigation that are not readily translated into role-theoretical terms (Jones et al. 1972; Shaver 1975). The reason seems to be that most often, attribution theorists have dealt with strictly transitory role allocations of the type that can be simulated in the one-time laboratory experiment, using subjects who are strangers to each other. In addition, they have employed a rather mechanical and incomplete concept of role. These and other limitations for translation into sociological theorizing have been well stated by Alexander and Epstein (1969).

However, current conclusions from attribution theory and research may appear to raise three questions for the theory of person and role advanced here. First, attribution theorists' finding that role behavior is discounted as an indicator of personal disposition (Jones, Davis, and Gergen 1961; Harold Kelly in Jones et al. 1972, pp. 1-26) calls into question the underlying assumption that some roles are significantly merged with the person in the eyes of both actors and audiences. Second, the same discounting principle from attribution theory seems to discredit the *appearance* principle, which is one of the foundation stones of the theory advanced here. And third, the finding that observers, but not actors, tend to infer personal dispositions from behavior even when that behavior is under obvious direction or constraint (Edward E. Jones and Richard E. Nisbett in Jones et al. 1972, pp. 79-94), provides an important answer to the first two questions but seems to challenge the assumption that actors' identifications are strongly influenced by their social circles' identifications of them.

Two important observations help to place the attribution findings in context. First, while there has been overwhelming empirical support for the hypothesis that obviously in-role behavior produces fewer internal attributions than role-independent behavior, the evidence as summarized by Jones and Nisbett (Jones et al. 1972, pp. 79-94) shows a marked tendency to make internal attributions under both conditions. Ring (1964) speculates that people are confused and suspicious about out-of-role behavior, instead of preferring it as a basis for inferring personal dispositions.

Second, attribution theorists' experiments are generally designed to alert subjects to the likelihood that personal disposition and role may be contradictory, rather than to ascertain what people take for granted in the absence of conflicting cues. In certain of the experiments the observer-actor relationship is explicitly between supervisor and worker (Strickland 1958) or between high- and low-status members (Ring 1964), creating

reasons for the observer not to accept the actor's behavior at face value too readily. But if attribution theorists have focused on a special class of cases in which subjects must choose between conflicting appearances, have they not thereby accepted the appearance principle implicitly? If, in the face of conflicting appearances, subjects nevertheless make internal attributions more frequently than predicted, is it not reasonable to suppose that in the absence of contradictory cues the tendency to identify the person with the role should be even more widespread? I suggest that the appearance principle has been an unstated and unexplored assumption underlying major attribution theories, while the effect and consistency principles have direct counterparts in attribution theory.

If the appearance principle and the assumption that others frequently conceive the person as revealed in the role are consistent with attribution theory, there remains the question whether the difference between observer and actor tendencies vitiates the assumption that ego tends to become the person that significant others treat him as being. In a masterful exposition of the difference between actor and observer perspectives, Jones and Nisbett (Jones et al. 1972, pp. 79-94) explain the actor's preference for external attributions and the observers' preferences for internal attributions on the basis of different information available and different principles of information processing for actor and observer. The force of Jones's argument may be weakened, however, when ego's enactment of the role is recurrent and when there are continuing opportunities for communicating role-person conceptions between the actor and social circle. The findings may also be an artifact of the choice of situations for investigation in which the actor is disposed to escape responsibility rather than take credit for accomplishments.

But the reported differences between actor and observer attributions have direct bearing on a theory of self-conception rather than a theory of role-person merger. The concept of role-person merger is behavioral rather than cognitive and allows explicitly for the possibility that the individual's stated self-conception may be at variance with the behaviorally relevant merger of person and role. These insights from attribution theory may help to explain interesting discrepancies of this sort.

Some Remaining Problems

The questions raised in this paper are not new but have seldom been treated as part of an integrated concern with the merger of role with person. The entire exercise might reasonably be viewed as an effort to approach the traditional problems of self and self-conception from a more behavioral standpoint that avoids the well-known weaknesses of subjective indicators of self-locus. My aims have been to identify a problem and

suggest an approach for dealing with it. The few principles suggested here are only a small beginning for a wide-ranging study of a complex and important question. Nevertheless, they may have shed light on some of the paradoxical differences between sexes in the personal significance of occupational and family roles, and on other problems in the relation between person and role. Three issues in particular are highlighted by this effort and deserve more serious attention.

The pattern of convergence and divergence between the roles that resist compartmentalization and those that are salient in the stated self-conception merits careful study. In occupational socialization, for example, the most intense self-feeling may come early when the individual is preoccupied with mastering the role, while the most inflexible commitment to the role may come after one has developed an interdependent role repertoire.

Also, some fresh insights into the perennial issue of situational behavior versus pervasive personal consistency may be derived from this line of inquiry. A personal consistency that transcends situationally limited roles is of varying utility to individuals and to their social circles. Weak pressures to merge role with person or competing strong pressures toward merger often leave situational behavior paramount.

Finally, I have dealt only with anchorage of the person in more or less institutionalized roles. An important resolution to the problem of disjunction between community attributions and personal organization may be to remain personally uninvolved in all of one's more institutional roles and to lodge the person in ephemeral and esoteric roles. A declining tendency to locate the self in institutional roles has been noted by some observers (Zurcher 1972; Turner 1976); it might be explained by a growing divergence in the working of processes that determine community attributions and the individual's personal organization.

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