Chapter 11 Applied Social Role Theory

Chapter Outline

I. Introduction
   A. History of word: From Latin for wooden roll with parchment. Actors learned parts by reading the words as they were turned
   B. Imagery: human behavior as a dramatic performance

II. Related Dialects, Associated Schools of Thought
   A. Interactionist or processual approach: improvisation emphasized; priority to role taking and role making creatively
   B. Structuralist approach: scripted performance in standard social positions emphasized; priority to conforming to role expectations

III. Applied Social Role Theory: Exemplary Models
   A. Robert Linton was an anthropologist who made conceptual distinction between a status and a role, also differentiated ascribed and achieved roles
   B. George Herbert Mead theorizing about the importance of taking the others role or perspective during cooperative activity, and the relationship of this role taking to the social self
   C. Erving Goffman elaborated on theatrical metaphor as basic framework for understanding social life, also studied social institutions and stigma
   D. Jacob Moreno pioneered the application of role theory by developing helping methods of psychodrama and sociodrama
   E. Helen Harris Perlman was a social work professor who demonstrated the usefulness of role theory for social work topics like intake, adult change, and psychosocial problems

IV. Applied Social Role Theory: Root Metaphors
   A. The person as actor
      1. Client as protagonist in his or her own play with difficult performance problems and bad reviews, playing certain parts unsuccessfully. People
         a. Vary in acting ability
         b. Vary in awareness of expressions given off
         c. Vary in sincerity of their performance
         d. Vary in on stage and off stage behavior and attitudes
      2. Auxiliaries (family members, co-workers, others) support or hinder performances
      3. Antagonists to client (withholding client rights, etc)
      4. Chorus (mutual aid groups) comment on and support performances
   B. The social environment as a theatrical house
      1. Theater company (the agency)
      2. Play producer (board president)
      3. Playwright (executive administrator)
      4. Directors (team leaders and program administrators)
      5. Actors in company (social workers)
      6. Stagehands (support staff)
      7. Audience (clients and public)
      8. Stage (worker’s office and group counseling rooms with own scenery and props)
9. Play (each helping session)
   C. The social worker as director (to client’s new play) –
      1. Organizes resources, warms up actor, encourages good performances, responds to audience reactions, helps client reflect on performances afterwards
      2. Guides helping process – a sequence of scenes including preparatory to performance, actual performance/middle phase, review or ending phase
      3. Leads as versatile director– two person plays, multi-person plays, multi-organizations play
      4. Duties of director and duties of social worker are similar: design ideal stage, match Actors to best parts, coach and prepare actors, monitor actors performances, spread the word about good performances

V. Core Assumptions of Applied Social Role Theory
   A. Human behavior is patterned
      1. Role is identifiable as patterns of action identifiable as cluster by members of community
         a. Recognizable, distinguishable, predictable
         b. Role has name/title associated with it
         c. Certain costumes, gestures, and spoken lines are required by role
         d. Roles have historical and cultural origin
   B. Performances are influenced by contextual factors
      1. We play certain roles in certain times and places and not in others
      2. Context clearly specifies role script or leaves some details vague
      3. Cultural memberships (race, gender, religion, etc.) effect expected performance of role incumbent
   C. The social role is the dynamic aspect of position
      1. Role includes name, rank, job description, communication channels linked to position
      2. Many roles are “chart positions,” part of organizational structure
      3. A position is in a set of positions, and a role attached to the position often has a counter role (leader and follower)
      4. Charts not always accurate and current
   D. People are aware of roles and respond to expectations
      1. Actors have some awareness of expectations for their performance (rights and privileges)
      2. Actors have some awareness of expectations for other role players
         a. There are variations in how well organizations communicate expectations and how much room for negotiating new expectations

VI. Applied Social Role Theory and Human Development
   A. Exemplary role model – none, there are many contributors
   B. Assumptions
      1. Human development is a process of socialization: training for role (provision of knowledge, skills, and attitudes
      2. Socialization is a life long process
   C. Root metaphors
      1. Person in lifelong acting school
         a. Anticipatory socialization
         b. Professional socialization
         c. Resocialization
2. Clients are coached to perform their roles (role induction process)
3. Socialization occurs for different time spans (for roles, for role sequences or careers, for the entire life course)
   a. Short role performance (client applicant trained for agency role)
   b. Role career – sequence of related roles organized predictably (work career)
   c. Roles across a life course – learning and acquiring new roles and exiting old roles
D. The social role approach to role transitions and self processes
   1. Role transitions can be on time or off time; vary in ease; are easier following anticipatory socialization; difficult role transitions are stressful
   2. Socialization and the self: changes in role identities, change in the content of these identities, changes in the salience of particular roles and role identities; changes in esteem and efficacy following mastery of new roles
E. Critical comments
   1. Minimal consideration of the influence of historical period, age of actor, social cohorts
   2. Need to clarify the relative weight of structural variables and process variables
F. Applications
   1. Golan’s social work model for facilitating role transitions
   2. Ashforth on guidance for handling transitions across life course
   3. George on self-help literature for managing difficult transitions

VII. Mapping Applied Social Role Theory
   A. Figure 11.1: Eco-Map: The Applied Social Role Theory Version
   B. Applied social role Theory translations
      1. How are connections conceptualized?
         a. Expectations (demands and rights) as part of organizational structures and as communicated and negotiated during interaction
      2. How is the quality of connections differentiated?
         a. Positive
            1. Consensus about expectations
            2. Clarity of expectations
            3. Expectations are complimentary
         b. Negative
            1. Disagreement about expectations or low consensus
            2. Ambiguity of expectations
            3. Expectations do not compliment each other, discordance
         c. Forms of role strain (negative connections) include
            1. Role ambiguity
            2. Role conflict (within a role, between roles)
            3. Role incompetence
            4. Role incongruity (poor fit of person and role expectations)
            5. Role overload and burnout
            6. Role under load
      3. What is the typical unit of attention or focal system?
         a. The person as impression manager, body as acting equipment, role-conceptions or identities, hierarchy of role identities, varying commitment to role identities, inner audience and
         b. The role and
         c. The organization
4. How is the environment conceptualized?
   a. The physical environment is like the theater – on stage and backstage, stage design issues, region outside the organization
   b. The social environment includes:
      1. Set of roles linked to a position (roles of full-time faculty)
      2. Person set (particular others linked to a person in a role)
      3. Role networks, chains of roles linked through communication, exchange, and cooperation

5. Is particular emphasis given to any systems?
   a. The audience to role performances (seen and unseen-reference groups)
   b. The actor’s role-sets, person-sets, and role-networks
   c. Role-identities
   d. Societal role histories (changing meaning for role)

6. How are resources and their flow conceptualized?
   a. Resources
      1. Personal resources include life experience, education, vitality that person brings to a performance
      2. Interpersonal resources include social skills and social intelligence, rhetorical skills
   b. Flow issues
      1. Vulnerable groups often lack the tangible and intangible resources necessary for a successful role performance
      2. Multiple role engagements as resource and restraint

7. What descriptive words are used?
   a. terms from the theater

8. How is change conceptualized?
   a. Psychosocial change
      1. Start with role problem
      2. Identify motivators – bad reviews or low self-perceived competence in role
      3. Change actor, reference groups, or audience
      4. Use techniques that are general including coaching, mirroring, rehearsal, role bargaining, role clarification, role learning, role-making, role playing, role reversal, role-taking, soliloquy
      5. Use techniques for dealing with role strain: compartmentalize, negotiate, exit role, mediate
   b. Enact social work roles including stage designer, directors (and playwright when planning service)

9. How are actual and ideal eco-maps contrasted?
   a. Actual
      1. Deficiencies – limiting role performances
      2. Disorders (intrapsychic) – interfere with role performances
      3. Discrepancies in role definitions – harm role performances
      4. High risk roles
      5. The vulnerable are compelled to act insincerely because of low power
   b. Ideal
      1. Effective team role performances – discipline, loyalty, circumspection
      2. Coordinated performance by members of role network
      3. Convincing performances

10. How are issues of diversity, color and shading addressed?
a. Communities vary in the roles that they create
b. Groups vary in the access that they have to prestigious roles
c. Cultures differ in notions about the proper way to enact a role
d. Weak and oppressed groups often teach members how to “pass” in prohibited roles, and how to use impression management techniques

11. What would be added or deleted?
   a. audiences

VIII. The Limits of Applied Social Role Theory: A Social Work Appraisal
   A. Life is more unpredictable than scripts
   B. Role theory is not holistic (focuses mainly on social processes)
   C. Theory doesn’t deal with mundane activities with few dramatic possibilities (meeting survival needs)

IX. An Applied Role Theory Model for Promoting Altruism and Community Service
   A. Applied role theory problem formulation: students need to be motivated and taught how to enact volunteer / service roles
   B. Applied role theory assessment: role expectations of larger community, role expectations of significant others in networks, role taking capacities, and set of role identities and their salience
   C. Applied role theory intervention: a socialization process involving recruitment, placing, showing, shaping, and certifying activities