

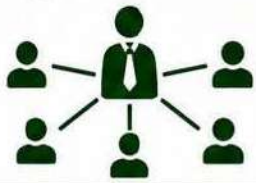
ROLE SET

– ROBERT K. MERTON –

Merton introduced the concept of **Role Set** to explain that a single social status involves **multiple related roles.** An individual occupying one position must interact with different people in different ways.

MEANING

A role set is the collection of multiple roles attached to a single social status.



EXAMPLES

TEACHER'S ROLE SET



- Students
- Parents
- Principal
- Colleagues
- Administration

Different expectations come from each relationship.

DOCTOR'S ROLE SET



- Patients
- Nurses
- Hospital Management
- Patient Families
- Medical Authorities

Different expectations come from each relationship.

POLICE OFFICER'S ROLE SET



- Public
- Courts
- Senior Officers
- Politicians
- Media

Different expectations come from each relationship.

MAIN FEATURES

MULTIPLE ROLE RELATIONSHIPS
One status connects to many people.

DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS
Each group expects different behaviour.

SOCIAL COORDINATION
Role sets help institutions function smoothly.

ROLE CONFLICT POSSIBLE
Conflicting expectations may create stress.

IMPORTANCE

- Explains complexity of modern society.
- Useful in organizational sociology.
- Important in professional role analysis.
- Helps understand institutional interaction.



CURRENT RELEVANCE

- Visible in bureaucracy.
- Common in corporate jobs.
- Important in hospitals and schools.
- Relevant in digital workplaces.



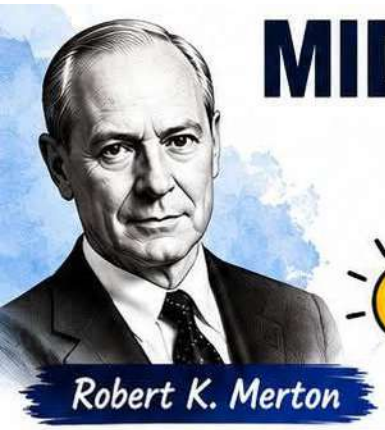
CRITICISM

- Role boundaries overlap.
- May cause stress and role overload.
- Less focus on power relations and inequality.



CORE IDEA

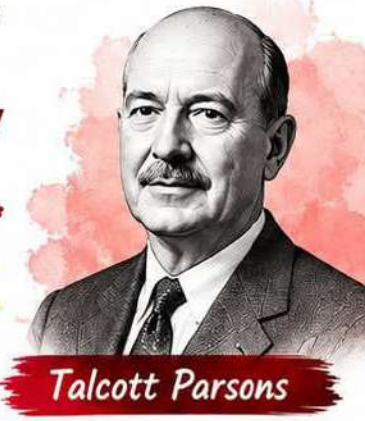
A single social status involves multiple interconnected role relationships with different individuals and groups.



Robert K. Merton

MIDDLE RANGE THEORY VS GRAND THEORY

Merton believed sociology should focus on **practical, research-based** theories instead of overly abstract grand theories.



Talcott Parsons

MIDDLE RANGE THEORY		GRAND THEORY
Explains **specific** social phenomena.	MEANING	Attempts to explain the **entire society.**
Limited, narrow and focused.	SCOPE	Very **broad** and comprehensive.
Practical, concrete and empirical.	NATURE	**Abstract**, general and theoretical.
Based on **observation, data and research.**	RESEARCH BASIS	Based on **conceptual framework** and ideas.
Solves **specific** sociological problems.	GOAL	Develops **universal theory** of society.
Easily testable and scientifically verifiable.	TESTABILITY	**Difficult to test** empirically.
• Role Set • Anomie Theory • Reference Group Theory • Self-Fulfilling Prophecy	EXAMPLES	• Structural Functionalism • Social System Theory • Theory of Social Action

MAIN INSIGHT: Merton advocated **middle range theories** that are practical, testable and connected with **real social research.**



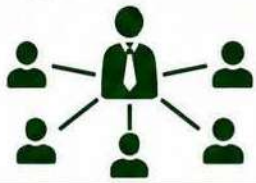
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- May cause stress and role overload.
- Less focus on power relations and inequality.



CORE IDEA

A single social status involves multiple interconnected role relationships with different individuals and groups.



REFERENCE GROUP THEORY

– ROBERT K. MERTON –

Merton developed Reference Group Theory to explain how individuals evaluate themselves and shape their behaviour by comparing with certain social groups.

MEANING

A reference group is a group that individuals use as a standard for evaluating their behaviour, attitudes, values or aspirations.

MAIN IDEA

People shape their behaviour, identity and aspirations by comparing themselves with socially important groups.

TYPES OF REFERENCE GROUPS

1 MEMBERSHIP GROUP

A group to which a person actually belongs.

EXAMPLES

Family, classmates, workplace group, etc.

2 NON-MEMBERSHIP GROUP

A group a person does not belong to but admires or aspires toward.

EXAMPLES

Celebrities, elite class, influencers, successful professionals, etc.

POSITIVE & NEGATIVE REFERENCE GROUPS

POSITIVE REFERENCE GROUP

Groups that inspire imitation, admiration and aspiration.

EXAMPLE Students following successful professionals.

NEGATIVE REFERENCE GROUP

Groups that individuals reject or avoid identifying with.

EXAMPLE Avoiding criminal peer groups or antisocial groups.

EXAMPLES IN MODERN SOCIETY

- Influence of celebrities on fashion and lifestyle
- Social media influencers and online comparison
- Career and status aspirations
- Consumer choices and brand imitation

IMPORTANCE

- Explains social comparison
- Important in identity and aspiration formation
- Useful in media sociology and consumer behaviour

CORE IDEA

Individuals evaluate themselves and shape their behaviour, identity and aspirations by comparing with groups they admire, belong to, or reject.



SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

— ROBERT K. MERTON —

Merton introduced the concept of **Self-Fulfilling Prophecy** to explain how false beliefs or expectations influence behaviour in ways that eventually make those beliefs appear true.

MEANING

A self-fulfilling prophecy is a false definition or expectation that evokes behaviour which makes the originally false belief become true.

MAIN IDEA — Human behaviour is strongly influenced by expectations and social beliefs.

PROCESS OF SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

1. **FALSE BELIEF** — An incorrect assumption is created.
2. **BEHAVIOURAL RESPONSE** — People behave according to that assumption.
3. **REALITY CHANGES** — Actions produce outcomes matching the original belief.

Thus, the false belief becomes true.

CLASSIC EXAMPLE BY MERTON

BANK PANIC

People falsely believe a bank will collapse. → Customers rush to withdraw their money. → Massive withdrawals actually cause the bank to fail.

False fear becomes real reality.

OTHER EXAMPLES

EDUCATION
Teacher believes a student is intelligent → gives more encouragement → student performs better.

WORKPLACE
Employee labelled "inefficient" → receives less trust → performance declines.

SOCIETY
Negative stereotypes influence opportunities and behaviour.

RUMOURS & MEDIA
Rumours or misinformation influence public behaviour and create real outcomes.

SOCIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

- Explains the power of labels, expectations and beliefs.
- Important in education sociology and labelling theory.
- Shows how perceptions can create real consequences.
- Useful in media studies, identity formation and social psychology.

MERTON'S VIEW

- Beliefs shape social behaviour.
- Social expectations can create real consequences.
- People respond not only to reality, but also to their definition of reality.

CURRENT RELEVANCE

- Social media narratives and trends
- Stock market panic
- Rumours and misinformation
- Political polarization
- Stereotypes and discrimination

CRITICISM

- Over-simplification: Not every belief becomes reality.
- Limited structural analysis: Ignores broader social, economic and political structures.
- More psychological than sociological at times.

CORE IDEA — False beliefs and expectations can influence behaviour in ways that eventually make those beliefs appear true in reality.



ANOMIE THEORY / STRAIN THEORY

– ROBERT K. MERTON –

Merton argued that deviance occurs when society encourages common goals but does not provide equal means to achieve them. This mismatch creates frustration, strain and social deviance.

MEANING OF ANOMIE

Anomie is a condition where there is a breakdown or imbalance between socially approved goals and legitimate means of achieving them.

CULTURAL GOALS

Society encourages goals such as:

Wealth · Success · Status · Achievement

INSTITUTIONAL MEANS

Legitimate and socially approved ways to achieve goals:

Education · Hard Work · Legal Employment · Following Rules

MAIN IDEA

Deviance emerges when people cannot achieve socially accepted goals through legitimate means.

MERTON'S MODES OF ADAPTATION

1 CONFORMITY

Accepts both goals and legitimate means.

EXAMPLE

Working hard through education and employment.

2 INNOVATION

Accepts goals but uses illegitimate means.

EXAMPLE

Fraud, corruption, cybercrime.

3 RITUALISM

Rejects major goals but follows rules mechanically.

EXAMPLE

A person following routine without ambition.

4 RETREATISM

Rejects both goals and means.

EXAMPLE

Drug addiction, social withdrawal.

5 REBELLION

Rejects existing system and wants new goals and means.

EXAMPLE

Revolutionary movements.

MERTON'S VIEW

- Deviance is structurally produced.
- Inequality creates strain.
- Social structure influences behaviour.
- Crime and deviance are not only individual problems but also social problems.

EXAMPLES IN MODERN SOCIETY

- Exam malpractice
- Corruption
- Financial fraud
- Cybercrime
- Illegal shortcuts for success

IMPORTANCE

- Linked deviance with social structure.
- Explained crime sociologically.
- Highly influential in criminology.
- Useful in studying inequality and youth crime.

CRITICISM

- Overemphasis on economic success.
- Ignores non-economic deviance.
- Limited attention to power; less focus on political domination and elite crime.

CORE IDEA

When society promotes success goals but denies equal opportunities, individuals experience strain that may lead to deviant behaviour.



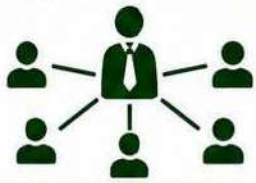
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MANIFEST AND LATENT FUNCTIONS

— ROBERT K. MERTON —

Merton developed the concepts of **Manifest** and **Latent** Functions to explain that social actions and institutions produce both intended and unintended consequences.

> "Institutions do not produce only positive effects. Unintended consequences are sociologically important."
> – Robert K. Merton

MANIFEST FUNCTIONS

Intended, recognized and openly stated consequences of social actions or institutions.

These are deliberate and expected outcomes.

LATENT FUNCTIONS

Unintended, hidden or unrecognized consequences of social actions or institutions.

These outcomes occur indirectly and are not openly acknowledged.

EXAMPLES

INSTITUTION / ACTION	MANIFEST FUNCTIONS (INTENDED)	LATENT FUNCTIONS (UNINTENDED)	DYSFUNCTIONS (NEGATIVE EFFECTS)
EDUCATION SYSTEM	• Providing knowledge • Skill development • Career preparation	• Friendship formation • Marriage networks • Social status competition	• Stress and anxiety • Academic pressure • Inequality reinforcement
RELIGION	• Worship • Moral guidance	• Social unity • Emotional comfort • Political influence	• Religious conflict • Blind faith • Conservatism
SOCIAL MEDIA	• Communication • Information sharing	• Addiction • Comparison culture • FOMO (fear of missing out)	• Misinformation • Privacy invasion • Mental health issues
FAMILY	• Reproduction • Child socialization	• Inheritance transfer • Emotional dependency • Sense of security	• Nepotism • Gender discrimination • Domestic conflict

MERTON'S VIEW

- Institutions produce both intended and unintended effects.
- Hidden social effects are equally important.
- Criticized earlier functionalists for assuming all institutions are fully beneficial.

DYSFUNCTION

Negative consequences that disturb social stability or create problems in society.

Example:
Spread of misinformation on social media.

IMPORTANCE

- Made functionalism more realistic.
- Connected sociology with empirical observation.
- Useful for analyzing modern institutions.
- Highly applicable to contemporary society.

CRITICISM

- Distinction between manifest and latent may overlap.
- Interpretation is subjective.
- Still focused on stability; less attention to conflict and power.

CORE IDEA

Every social institution or action produces both intended (manifest) outcomes and unintended (latent) consequences, including some negative (dysfunctions), which shape society in complex ways.