A MODEL OF MODERN CHARACTER

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This essay attempts to develop a model of character that is sociological in nature, in that it is 1) role based, 2) deductively approached, and sociohistorically specific.

ROLE BASED ANALYSIS

A sociology of character ought not be directed at the individual's psychic structure which serves the function of translating, organizing, satisying, and channeling organic drives and dispositions in the light of environmental restraints (Gerth and Mills, 1953). Instead, the focus must be restricted to that component of the general personality system linked directly to those environmental restraints called roll obligations (Parsons and Shils, 1951). Three specific levels of analysis must be distinguished: 1) personality, 2) action, and 3) the sociocultural levels.

Personality, in a sociological sense refers to the individual's subjective definition of social roles. Of particular importance to the personality level are the elements of role motivation, role evaluation, and role efficacy. Role motivation is that aspect of subjective definition which consists of justification and rationalization for engaging in role activity (Foote, 1951; Goode, 1960; Gerth and Mills, 1953; Becker, 1960; Bredemeier and Stephenson, 1962). Role evaluation refers to the position of the role in the individual's hierarchy of significance, ego-involvement, and identity (Sherif and Cantril, 1947; Goffman, 1961; Turner, 1975). Role efficacy involves the perceived degree of mastery, control, and competence, in role performance.

The action level describes the situational component of role activity. It is associated with role perception and role playing. By role perception we mean the individual's interpretation of behavior expected in the situation, developed through a process of role taking (Sarbin, 1968; Turner, 1968). Role playing refers to the performance devised and enacted on the basis of that perception (Goffman, 1959). The action level concerns the compliant, cooperative, and conformist aspects of role behavior.

The sociocultural level refers to the objective definition of institutional spheres and interactive systems. The two major elements associated with this level are role function and role location. By role function we mean that roles can be analyzed in terms of their impact on society. Role location refers to the degree to which the matrix of the individual's other roles is socioculturally given. (See Figure 1)

FIGURE 1
THE ROLE ANALYSIS MODEL

Level	Definition	Elements
Personality	Subjective	Role motivation Role evaluation Role efficacy
Action	Situational	Role perception Role playing
Socio-cultural	Objective	Role function Role location

The personality, action, and sociocultural levels are independent, yet interpenetrating levels of analysis. For example, the action level can be viewed as a dialectical process between subjective and objective definitions of concrete social roles. That is, the actor brings to each situation motivational, evaluational and efficacy orientations. At the same time, the actor is aware of his or her place in the social structure, and of what is expected in various situations. Social action can be conceptualized partially in terms of the mutual effects of these two forces, which can vary in their degree of symmetry, conflict, and compatibility. Whereas role function helps shape role performance-- role evaluation and role motivation help shape the role structure that is sought out by the individual. In this analysis, the sociology of personality must center on the personality action nexus. To explain this linkage, one must account for the sociocultural factors impinging on and manifested at the action level. The frame of reference applies at the level of the individual actor. Our questions are: How do role motivation, role evaluation, and role efficacy affect role playing? How does role perception (which reflects role function and expectations) help shape role motivation, role evaluation, and role efficacy?

By 'character' we mean the totality of

individual orientations toward role obligations. Such an orientational system consists of: 1) personality orientations, such as role motivation, evaluations and efficacy; 2) action orientations, or role perceptions, and 3) sociocultural orientations or role functions. The individual is oriented to subjective, situational, and objective aspects of social roles.

DEDUCTIVE ANALYSIS

A sociological social psychology must be katascopic in that it begins at the system level, and works down to the level of the individual (Durkheim, 1912). As a deductive strategy, the three levels are analyzed in terms of a cybernetic hierarchy (Parsons, 1977). From an analysis of the sociocultural level, we derive the general structure of the action level, and from this we derive the basis for personality analysis. The starting point of personality and action lies in the macro-level framework, which is independent of human volition. Rather than beginning with the processes of world construction, symbolic interaction, and paramount reality of everyday life as an anascopic view, a deductive strategy analyzes these processes only within the broader sociocultural framework. (See Berger and Luckman, 1966; Mead, 1964; Blumer, 1965; Goffman, 1969; and Schultz, 1962.) While a katascopic approach places the sociocultural level at 'command post' of the cybernetic hierarchy, this by no means indicates a unidirectional flow of influence. Neither does the adoption of a deductive strategy preclude the existence of a dialectical relation between the respective levels.

HISTORICALLY   SPECIFIC   SOCIAL CATEGORIES

The next step in developing a sociological model of character is the analysis of social categories which relate to the personality, action, and sociocultural levels of analysis. These social categories permeate objective, situational, and subjective definitions, and serve to integrate the macro and individual levels of analysis, which is the major task of sociological social psychology. The categories can be used to interpret and order 1) the functions and expectations of various institutional spheres, 2) the structure of the individual's

role complex, and 3) the structure of individual motivation, evaluation, and efficacy.

These social categories are rooted in a sociohistorical context. Only by approaching the study of general processes in the light of specific sociohistorical realities can character analysis be made sociological. Five such general issues can be identified. 1) To what extent is there a disjunction between subjective personality definitions and situational action or objective sociocultural definitions? 2) To what extent should one isolate a model character type as opposed to identifying the multiplicity of potential character adaptations? 3) To what degree is character unitary or segmented in nature? 4) What is the level of self-conscious awareness which individuals bring to their role activities? 5) To what degree must character be viewed as a set of stable orientations extending through life, as opposed to a conception emphasizing the pliancy of character? Character disjunction, uniformity, unity, awareness, and stability must be conceived as variables ranging from low to high in value. Each sociohistorical period is characterized by a particular pattern of distribution along these dimensions.

A MODEL OF MODERN CHARACTER

The first step in developing the model of modern character is to crosscut levels of analysis and social categories. The takeoff point is that the social categories of the sociohistorical period of modernity are the private and the public components, each of which has a subjective, a situational, and an objective definition. The interrelation of levels of analysis and definitions, on one hand, and private and public components on the other hand is shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2
DIMENSIONS   OF   THE   CHARACTER MODEL

Level	Definition	Part	Character
Personality	Subjective	1 Private 2 Public	Multiple references
Action	Situational	3 Private 4 Public	Role differences
Socio-cultural	Objective	5 Private 6 Public	Structure difference

But what exactly is meant by private and public components (Berger et al., 1972)? And how are they linked with the personality, action, and sociocultural levels, and their corresponding elements? Private and public components can be defined in terms of general attributes of concreteness and abstractness (Simmel, 1971; Zijderveld, 1970). The constituents of the private components are the self and primary groups, which the public component is made up of secondary groupings (Cooley, 1909). But how can the claim be defended that these categories or components represent social categories of modern society? For this we must demonstrate how the categories constitute a common denominator of the analysis of personality, action, and sociocultural levels of modern society.

Let us begin with the sociocultural linkage indicated by Cells 5 and 6 of Figure 2. The sociocultural level is characterized by structural differentiation, one meaning of which involves the autonomy of institutional spheres. This means that each institutional sphere is restricted to a narrow, delimited area of responsibility. For example, the family is responsible for child care and primary socialization, and economic institutions are responsible for the production of goods and services. Similarly, political, educational, and religious institutions are assigned specific functions in society (Parsons, 1971). We will subsume the many functions performed by these institutions under the umbrella headings of private functions and public functions. By private functions we mean the range of expressive functions, including emotional release, a home base as a refuge, and meaning and identity for the individual. These functions are assigned in modern society primarily to institutions such as the family, neighborhood, ethnic, religious, and other types of voluntary associations (Cell 5, Figure 2). By public functions we mean the instrumental functions which involve the coordination and organization of activities critical to social survival and adaptation (Parsons and Bales, 1955). Such functions are assigned in modern society to the polity, economy, legal, and educational institutions (Cell 6). Each set of institutions has in common both functions and expectations. Each set of institutions has associated with it either private or public expectations. Private expectations include self-actualization, affectivity, and diffuse-

ness, and the public expectations include specificity, rationality, impersonality, and impartiality (Parsons, 1951).

Not every institution involves both private and public aspects, but some institutions belong in both categories. However, each institution can be categorized as either private or public according to its primary function in the social structure of modern society.

There is another kind of differentiation within the modern sociocultural system: namely, variegated and heterogeneous social locations. Social milieus in modern society are particularly differentiated along urban-rural, social class, life-style, racial, and cultural lines. Each milieu establishes broad parameters for the action and personality levels.

Structural or institutional differentiation is expressed at the action level in the form of role differentiation. The individual in modern society is confronted with a plurality of role demands and expectations (Berger et al., 1972). The important factor at the action level is the individual's perception of role expectations. The individual can act on the basis of either private or public expectations (Parsons, 1951). These can be designated respectively as the private and public roles of the individual. Another factor is the distribution of public and private roles in an individual's role complex. Individuals differ in the amount of time devoted to private and concrete or public and abstract roles, and they vary in their respective participation in either self-centered or primary and secondary or group activities.

Not only are there private and public functions, expectations, and allocations of public and private roles, but there are public and private reference points which are relevant to the personality level. This means that in modern society, the individual in each situation has available the reference points of the self or private primordial groups and organizational public groups, which comprise a continuum of concreteness to abstractness (Shils, 1957; Parsons, 1971; Berger et al., 1972; Merton, 1957). The reference point associated with a role provides the underlying motivation for role performance. For example, the role of father, objectively defined, can have either public or private reference points. Thus, whereas the father who directs his thought to the question of the

subsistence of his family possesses a private reference point, which the father who thinks of leaving his family to serve in the armed forces during a time of national crisis is using a public reference point. Role evaluation enters the analysis in that roles or situations, and their reference points are ranked according to some meaning system into a hierarchy.

The three levels of analysis which in one sense, independent of each other, and in another sense, in a relationship of mutual influence. For example, the independence of the personality and action levels is reflected in what we call personality-action disjunction. There is no necessary correspondence between the nature of a role and the nature of the reference points attached to it. An individual can be acting out a public role, but have a private reference point, and vice versa. Similarly, the action level is not simply the product of the interplay or personality and the sociocultural level, but also a function of independent processes operating at that level. However, the personality and sociocultural levels impinge on the action level, just as the action level acts back on the personality and sociocultural levels. Given the fact that in modern society, there exists a multiplicity of potential orientations for the individual in each situation, it follows that the result would be a multiplicity of character adaptations to that situation among the members of the society.

Role differentiation places a limit on the degree to which character is unitary. Thus, the degree of unity of character is problematic in modern society. Here, there is a significant degree of self-conscious awareness associated with character. An active cognitive posture is required to reconcile the numerous and often discordant role demands imposed on the individual, as well as the plural reference points available to him.

Stability of character in modern society is made precarious for three reasons. 1) Self-conscious awareness which involves the recognition of options often has as one effect, an instability of character orientation. 2) The individual is generally besieged by alternative orientational sets which call into question and possibly undermine the plausibility of one's existing character structure (Berger et al., 1972). 3) Modern society is characterized by sharp delinea-tions in biographical stages, each of which call for and expect distinct orientational sets.

Character in the modern context, refers to the totality of the individual's orientations toward private and public components. By personality orientation, we mean the extent to which the individual is privately or publicly motivated and committed. By action orientation is meant the degree to which the individual perceives roles in private terms, and enacts private and public roles.

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