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THE CONCEPT OF ROLE IN DISASTER RESEARCH\*

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# The Concept of Role in Disaster Research

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The concern here starts with a confused sociological concept-role- and examines its application in a confusing social situation--disaster. Out of that compounded confusion, the goal here is to provide a review of the concept as it has been used in the sociological approaches to disaster. The result may develop a greater degree of conceptual clarity.

The concept of role seemingly was added to the social science lexicon by its introduction, that of status and role, in a very influential book, The Study of Man by anthropologist, Ralph Linton (1936). Its use quickly spread. It was a bridge between "sociological" social psychology and "psychological" social psychology. It provided a useful handle to describe behavior which previously had been conceptualized in individualistic and personality terms. It was a tool which was universal in its application, not bounded by particular cultural traditions. It was adaptable to several different methodologies. Perhaps its dramaturgical qualities appealed to the more humanistically-oriented social scientist since it provided some ties for the social sciences to the classic literary tradition •. Regardless of the reasons for the acceptance, its use and its utility made the concept a central one within the sociological tradition.

Its widespread use within the social sciences does not imply that there is consensus on the concept itself. As Heiss (1981:94) has suggested, "to immerse oneself in the literature of social roles is to get the feeling that one has been transported with Alice behind the looking glass." Looking through that glass, it is obvious that authors use varying labels for the same phenomenon. Also, when different authors use the same term, one cannot be sure they are talking about the same thing. Sometimes, the reference is to social position--status, in Linton's terms. At other times, it refers to

behavior associated with that position. And at other times, it refers to expectations for behavior associated with certain positions. If the meaning is in terms of "expectations," it is often not clear whether these expectations come from "society," from certain reference groups or from the actor.

This is not the place to sort out these complexities with the aim of developing a simplified and unified version of role theory. It will suffice here to point out how the concept has been utilized in the disaster literature and how the concept was used by various authors. Sometimes, authors used role to indicate social position. Others used role as behavior. Others used role as expectation which was then generalized to behavior. Some used the three different meanings simultaneously without any distinction. It is not suggested here that those working in the disaster area were more inconsistent than those using the term in other substantive areas. They were not. In fact, it will be argued here that there were certain conditions in disaster situations which revealed the contradictions in role theory in rather vivid ways. Consequently, while role informed the disaster tradition, the disaster tradition provides some powerful lessons for the utility and use of the concept of role.

#### Differing Sociological and Methodological Approaches to Roles

It is important to provide certain stake points amidst the complexities of role theory before embarking on its usage within the disaster tradition. Two different approaches have characterized the sociological tradition of social roles--the structuralist and the interactionist. The structuralist seeks the explanation for roles (expectations and behavior) in terms of positions within the social structure. Such positions provide the framework for both the development of expectations and the enactment of behavior. Even when actors do not follow the norms, the sources of non-conformity are not individual virtuosity, but structural. Sources of strain and non-conformity can be

sought in structural incompatibilities and in the lack of integration in role systems rather than seeking explanations in terms of individual aberrations.

The second approach focuses on the interactionist perspective which sees the actors and the interaction pattern as the key elements in the process. With this approach, interaction is guided by the actor's definition of the situation and actors do not accept roles as structurally given. Persons are involved in the process of role taking and role making. (Turner, 1976) The assumption here is that the actor's behavior is purposive, rather than structurally determined. Such actors try to maximize the rewards for behavior over the costs and consequently they are always in the process of modifying the role scripts presented to them.

It is not necessary here to choose among these alternatives as to the most appropriate approach. Merton's comment (1975:31) will suffice "ideas in structural analysis and symbolic interactionism are opposed to one another in the same sense as ham is opposed to eggs: they are perceptively different but mutually enriching." In general, that mutually enriching assumption is made here and the disaster area has been one in which the utility of both approaches can be seen. However, it is an area in which the limitations of particular approaches can be seen with some vividness.

Differing theoretical approaches to role theory explain only part of the differences in how roles are conceptualized. Some of those differences are inherent in various methodological techniques which social scientists have utilized in their own research. Much research, particularly that which uses various survey methods, determine "role" by establishing some social position and, on the basis of that position, infer both expectations and behavior. Another technique has been to concentrate on the observation of behavior and then to infer back to expectations and to position. The procedure has been most common in field research. Since some of the

necessary.

Much research by social scientists is based on survey methods in which respondents are treated as "individual" and as "representative" of some social unit--a victim population, a community, etc. Such individuals are asked to classify themselves in terms of certain social attributes--age, sex, occupation, etc. In subsequent analysis, these attributes are used as the basis for classifying people in terms of structural location. It is usually assumed that persons occupying such social locations will possess certain expectations and also exhibit certain behavior because of that social location. Since those administering the survey instrument seldom have time to observe subsequent behavior, it is assumed that responses to selected items can be used as retrospective explanations for past behavior or as prospective predictions for future behavior. Such methods to infer role behavior implicitly use the "all other things equal" exclusion by focusing on one role at a time, substituting methodological simplicity for social complexity.

So, in this approach, social position is known. The role expectations of persons in that social location are usually inferred according to some standard script assumed by the investigator. Role relationships are also inferred from the static categories as is role behavior. So, in effect much role research is based only on derivative data on expectations and behavior. Because this derivative data can be quantified, the prediction of future behavior is given unwarranted precision.

A second approach starts with the observations of behavior and moves back to trace this behavior through expectations and position. This methodological approach has been used most frequently in field work in emergency situations. While it lacks the appearance of methodological

precision, this direct focus on actual behavior in emergency is the end result which survey methods attempts to measure. It also views role behavior in terms of its complexity, not as a single abstracted item of behavior for which all other things are equal. It can also give attention to forms of interaction within role relationships. In one sense, field methods which observe actual role behavior place role relationships in its proper social context. This method also increases the possibility of discovering relationships other than just testing hypotheses about those relationships. The position taken here is that a better understanding of roles can be obtained by observing role behavior in all of its complexity. Such a base provides a more secure grounding for assuming role expectations. It also is a more adequate base for observing how roles are modified and how new roles relationships emerge.

### The Disaster Context and Its Implication for Role Theory

In addition to the complexities of the concept of role, "disaster" has its own ambiguities. The term implies here those situations which have the potential for the maximum effect on role systems and role relationships. Consequently, we will concentrate here the meaning of "disasters" on those events which are sudden and whose effects are diffuse and on those events which provide little or no warning. Such events, and the prototype would be the massive earthquake, constitute only one segment of what could be called "disasters." In addition, we plan to focus here almost exclusively on the emergency period. Disasters are also events which evolve over time, going from pre-impact and preparedness through recovery and rehabilitation. For our purposes here, the emergency period of sudden disasters optimize the conditions for role "problems" and provide the best opportunity to examine the functioning of roles. Few other social situations can offer the possibilities to examine such a range of problems.

For example, to what extent are "traditional" role expectations carried over in disaster situations? Do these traditional role expectations produce dysfunctional behavior? Are they irrelevant? Are they

contradictory? If traditional roles are abandoned, how are new norms created to guide behavior in disaster? If new roles are created, how are they integrated? If they are not integrated, what are the new sources of strain which a disaster event creates? Do new roles created role "overloads" for individuals? Is there a process of role simplification which channelizes appropriate behavior into significant activities? Do all new roles have to be created to deal with the "new" social situations which disasters create? To what extent can people be trusted to create new roles. Does disaster create conditions where people have to be given roles in order to behave in appropriate fashion? When one examines the disaster research tradition, the concept of role has proved useful either directly or incidentally for many classic studies. Many of the early studies were on "victim" populations and consequently family role behavior was often studied by researchers, often in rather creative fashion. Marks and Fritz (1954) included a chapter on "Role Responsibility as a Determinant of Disaster Reaction," which focused on "dependence" and "responsibility" dimensions which were inferred from head of household items, employment status and number of dependent children. Such a classification in rural Arkansas in the early 1950's almost assured the allocation of most women within the community into a category of dependence. Although the study also included interviews with persons within the "responding" community, organizational officials, etc., this response was not conceptualized in role terms nor was their major consideration of the relationship between the victims and the response.

Interest in another type of dependency relationship--the aged--prompted Crawford to classify families in five different types (Moore and Crawford, 1955). In addition to the nuclear (or conjugal) family, he divided his Texas sample into the extended family, the broken extended family, usually with the parent generation broken, the aged parent,

functionally isolatea from their children and a "residual" family, consisting of a single aged person. He found that some of these family types were more vulnerable to disaster effects than were conjugal families. There was a tendency, for example, for families with aged members to be reluctant to move, to need more financial and relief aid as well as to recover more slowly from disaster effects.

Family roles became a major focus of attention through a classic article by Lewis Killian (1952). This article focused on the potential consequences of "multiple-group" membership in disaster and was important for raising questions about the relationship between family role systems and other emergency role systems. This article will be discussed at some length later.

Many of the ideas generated about family roles in early disaster research were included in an early "summary" volume edited by Baker and Chapman (1962, Chapter 7). Hill and Hansen added a reading of the existing disaster literature to their already extensive knowledge of family adaptation to stress, especially to wars and economic depressions, and developed a number of hypotheses. Some of these hypotheses focus directly on role problems in disaster. For example, they suggest the importance of role complementarity as an important variable in disaster response and also focus on problems of role readjustment to the "loss" of persons in disaster. Many of those ideas have never been tested, but they remain fruitful for some future study on the role of the family in disaster. Of course, the family is an area of continued research in disaster (Hultaker and Trost, 19B3) but role analysis is often incidental rather than central to that continuing discussion.

In addition to the focus on family roles, another type of concern within the disaster literature has been a focus on "occupational" roles within emergency organizations. Given a more recent focus on the response

of organized groups' to disaster events, the role relationships within and among these responding organizations have evoked some research interest. One of the earliest scholars to focus attention on this aspect was Allen Barton (1969).

Many of the leads Barton suggested were picked by Dynes in Organized Behavior in Disaster (1972). Working with an organizational typology to describe the community response to disaster events, Dynes developed certain ideas about a series of role "problems" which derived from the way in which various organizations "enter" the emergency system. Since these organized entities ranged from traditional "bureaucratic" community organization to emergent groups, some attention was also given to emergent roles in emergencies. This process of emergence both at the individual role level and at the group level has become a fruitful area for research in recent years. (Drabek: present volume)

Here we will focus on three different areas for a more detailed discussion. First is the articulation of family role systems with emergency role systems. Killian's early article was read by many as to confirm that emergency roles conflicted with familial roles and that the prediction for role behavior was that most (?) would opt to exhibit familial role expectations. The second area centers on the question of the emergence of new roles in disaster situations. If traditional roles are inappropriate or, if new roles are needed, how do these emerge? The third area is the question of how traditional (pre-disaster) roles are enacted in emergencies, focusing here on roles within community organizations which have an emergency responsibility. Are the traditional definitions of role behavior for police, fire or hospital personnel sufficient for emergencies? Each of these three areas provide insight into the conceptualization of role.

The Articulation of Family Role Systems with Emergency Roles--The Issue of Role Conflict

As has been indicated, much of the early disaster research in the United States was on "victims." Since victims had families, data were often collected on family status and analyses made of the "family" as a central explanatory variable. In 1952, Killian produced an article which appeared in a core sociological journal and gave attention to the concept of multiple roles and to the concept of disaster. The vividness of his discussion led many of his ideas to become utilized subsequently as "standard" sociological explanations. For those interested in disaster, the ideas expressed were important enough so that future research needed in some fashion to take account of the issue (Form and Nosow, Chapter 6). Killian's stated intent was to develop a typology that might generalize to situations other than disaster. He identified four different types of potential "dilemmas" of loyalty. First, he pointed out the choice between the family and other groups, principally the employment group or the community, and explained that this was the most common type of role conflict and discussed it at length. Second, he noted the conflict to those faced with playing the "heroic" role of rescue worker in contrast to fulfilling "occupational roles." Third, he discussed the conflict between the loyalty of employees to the company as an organization, and to fellow employees as friends and human beings. Fourth, he cited the conflict between loyalties to the community and to certain extra community groups.

In each of these cases, Killian suggests the choice made by the person between the conflicting demands may have serious consequences for the reorganization of the community and, in general, proposed that primary groups have the advantage in a conflict of loyalties. Other researchers subsequently picked up the idea of role conflict as an explanatory concept and added anecdotal evidence which created vividness and reinforced his

"findings." Most studies, however, were unclear about the concept of role as well as uncertain about the effects on actual behavior, but case study anecdotes of someone's personal dilemmas gave a sense of reality to the concept. Killian, however, in the original article, is more cautious. While he suggests that negative consequences could occur and implies that people do abandon their roles in favor of the "family," he concludes, paradoxically, that the resolution did not have the negative consequences one would have anticipated. He said, "yet in none of the four communities studied did the disastrous consequences contemplated above seem to have materialized" (1952, p. 311).

The implications of "family first" which was generally drawn from the discussion of role conflict was perhaps inadvertently reinforced by another theme in earlier disaster research. That theme was the continuing and perhaps enhanced functions of the family in disasters. In the fifties, there was a rather standard interpretation that industrialization had "defunctionalized" the family. That interpretation was not supported by early studies on disaster. Quarantelli (1960), summarized about 50 different reports which contained observations that the extended family was still a major source of support to which disaster victims turned for help, and concluded that the "protective" function of the family was still important, in contrast to the common view of supposed defunctionalization. Consequently, the enhanced importance of the family in disaster situations was interpreted by many as heightening the conditions which produce role conflict.

#### Subsequent Empirical Studies on Role Conflict

The prediction which many people made from Killian's typology was that role behavior in emergency occupational roles would be undercut by family obligations. The more adequate test of that assumption needed to be based on studies which observed actual behavior in such roles in emergencies. Two

studies allowed that kind of observation. The first of these studies was done by Meda White for the Disaster Study Group, National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council (1962). In observing the fact that many of the illustrations used by Killian were about persons whose role in emergency activity was unclear, e.g. refinery workers, ministers, etc., White decided to study persons who had definite role responsibility in disaster-activated organizations. She selected three tornado-struck communities (Waco, Flint, Worcester), because this was the disaster agent Killian had used for his examples and then interviewed organizational members who had role-defined responsibility during these emergencies.

She selected a number of organizations; city government, police and fire departments, state police, power company, gas company, radio stations, Red Cross, Salvation Army, and Civil Defense. In each organization, the de jure leaders of the organization during the disaster were interviewed as well as one organizational member of middle rank, and three of lower rank chosen by the every 8th name method. While not all of the interviews were completed in each of the three cities, White managed to complete 126 interviews. While her interviewing took place some eight years after the events, she concluded that "not a single person abandoned ongoing disaster work to be with his family." Even taking into account the possibilities of memory distortion, this is scarcely the type of resolution which would have been anticipated, given the prevailing assumptions about the usual consequences of role conflict.

In the sample, she found that 77 percent did their jobs first, without diversion to "family" roles. Another five percent did rescue work as individuals, rather than as organization members. Others at home at the time of impact, did disaster related activity there, and then reported to

work. In all, by the end of four hours, 89 percent had been engaged in disaster related activities and, again, not a single person had abandoned ongoing disaster work to be with his/her family.

The second source of data came from the cumulative studies by the Disaster Research Center. When ORC began its studies of emergency organizations in 1963, it was anticipated that, in spite of the contradictory evidence provided by White, role conflict still might be a significant problem and the field work was intended to be sensitive to any indication of the consequences of role conflict. However, in examining over 150 different disaster events and in the course of interviewing over 7000 different organizational officials, role conflict did not emerge as a problem.

In fact, over the years of field work, even anecdotal evidence in the functioning of emergency organization was non-existent. On the contrary, excess manpower was frequently problematic. Since there was such a discrepancy between the conventional wisdom and the ORC field experience, we decided to look more closely at a number of cases with the intent of better documenting what was commonly "known" about role conflict. We had, over the years, collected detailed descriptions about the behavior of a large number of role incumbents in a variety of types of organizations in several types of disaster events.

Various disaster agents have characteristics which have differential implications for behavior. We tried then to choose sites which provided some contrast in disaster agents. These cases involved four different types of disaster agents--a tornado, a flood, a hurricane, and an earthquake. These six research sites were: Anchorage in the Alaskan earthquake, 1964; New Orleans in Hurricane Betsy; 1965; a tornado in Topeka, Kansas, 1966; an extensive flood in Fairbanks, Alaska, 1967; a tornado in Lubbock, Texas, 1970; and a tornado in Xenia, Ohio, 1974.

In each of these research sites, we interviewed key persons, usually both the head of the organizations and the person who filled the major operational role during the emergency, in a variety of relevant organizations--local police departments, fire departments, hospitals, civil defense offices, municipal public works departments, offices of mayor and city manager, various utilities, mass media, Red Cross, Salvation Army, military units, National Guard units, sheriff's departments and others. In addition, in several of the communities, we interviewed specific types or organizations more extensively.

In each community, the interviewing pattern was similar. After establishing the person's occupation and organizational role, the individual was asked to indicate his or her physical location at the exact time the disaster occurred, and then asked to detail personal behavior during the emergency period. The length of the interviews which included additional information about the behavior of the person in the organizational role, whatever it was, varied from one to eight hours averaging about one hour and a half. After being transcribed, the interviews were read for the specific purpose of noting any verbal expression or any behavioral indication of role conflict.

Consequently, we read 443 different interviews of personnel in relevant emergency organizations. The interviews were detailed descriptions of their behavior during the emergency period. We did not ask them whether they had experienced "role conflict" since we were only concerned with the ways in which they behaved in an emergency. We classified them as to where they were when they became aware of the emergency--at work, at home, or neither.

The results show that among those persons at work, (N-183), none abandon his/her emergency role responsibilities. About 15 percent engaged at some time in search behavior, most of that was done in connection with

their job responsibilities. For example, a radio dispatcher might tell a patrol car that the next time the officers were in a certain area to drive by and see if everything is o.k. at his house. A few temporarily "left" their job to engage in some informational search. For example, one school official commented that before he started a damage assessment of school property, he walked outside to a point where he could see his house, and seeing it still standing, he proceeded on his assessment.

For those who were home (N-165), sixty-two percent were involved in what we called an active response, meaning that they quickly entered the emergency social system, either in their work role or in terms of some reaction to an emergency-created need. The rest were involved in what we called a passive response in that they did not take any immediate action to assume their organizational responsibilities. Such a stance, however, is not necessarily inappropriate. Most worked for organizations which followed a pattern of notifying them if they were needed for work.

For those who were neither at work nor at home (N-65), eighty-two percent were involved in an active response, some went directly to work while others went home before they reported to work, or stayed home to await notification.

In sum, in examining a sample of 443 persons who held positions in emergency-relevant organizations, not ~ abandoned his/her emergency role obligations to opt for familial-role obligations. For those who were at home, or away from home, or at the work site at the onset of the emergency, the most common response was to report to work, or to react in some fashion to needs created by the emergency. Of those persons who were not at work at the time of the emergency, some 28, or less than one percent of the sample, indicated some delay in reporting to work.

Finally, it should be noted that in the instance of the subsample of the earthquake, the most efficient test of the role conflict hypothesis, there was no abandonment of occupational role responsibilities, nor any delay in reporting, regardless of location. Consequently, in these observations there is not a glimmer of support for the usual predictions about the consequences of role conflict in emergency situations.

The lack of evidence for the "well known" consequences of role conflict present a number of interesting problems for the sociology of knowledge and the sociology of science. In addition, it is often more difficult to explain why something does not happen than to present reasons why it should. Here we can suggest only some of the "flaws," some of them due to the conceptualization of role and others due to insufficient attention given to certain role processes.

First, it is obvious that there is no simple relationship between position, role expectations and role behavior. Even the fact that persons in particular positions will express certain expectations about how they will behave in emergencies does not mean that such behavior will automatically follow. Too, there is no uniformity in role expectations attached to a particular position. For example, a major element in the expectations of a particular "father" can be to continue to assume occupational roles in emergencies. In fact, the usual formulation of role conflict involves a classic stereotype of the family--that of the employed male, unemployed (and incompetent) female and small anxious children. This image did not describe the range of family types, either qualitatively or statistically. The 1980 Census suggests that composition would only encompass about 13 percent of American families. Second, the conceptualization suggests a rigidity of role scripting. Family roles can easily incorporate in them emergency responsibility. For example, persons occupying day-to-day emergency roles--police, fire, etc., through pre-planning, as well as interaction, are able

to anticipate problems and to develop solutions. In addition, families provide a useful "manpower" resource in emergencies. It is common to find family units or part of them performing emergency responsibility--husband-wife teams, parent-child teams. In fact, it can be argued that the family, rather than being an impediment to emergency action, provides a useful resource allocation center which facilitate rather than impede emergency involvement. Family roles are not rigid scripts which are blindly followed toward dysfunctional behavior but they are adapted to meet the needs of the new situation. Neither life, nor playing roles becomes an either/or matter.

In addition to the capacity for individuals to adapt "standardized" roles to meet new situations, there are a number of structural changes which occur in disaster which mitigate the anticipated conflict. Dynes and Quarantelli (1977) have argued that role strain (discontinuity) is actually less in disaster than in "normal" times and that some of the structural changes which occur in emergencies provide the conditions for the positive reinforcement of relevant emergency roles. From this viewpoint, a community can be viewed as a collective attempt to achieve many different values. Since some of these values may conflict and since role obligations are based on values, this means that types of role strain are always an integral part of ongoing community life. A disaster event changes this rather dramatically, not in the sense of increasing role conflict but in the sense of the creation of an "emergency consensus" (Dynes 1970). This consensus of values make certain roles more important but other roles irrelevant. In a certain sense, there is a role "moratorium" which allows the quick sorting of roles critical to the emergency and to identify irrelevant role segments to be discarded. For example, it is quite unlikely that family vacations are planned to underscore family solidarity. However, common emergency activity might become a much more likely expression of such solidarity.

Thus, because of the emergence of an "emergency consensus," the aggregate role structure is simplified. Certain roles are given high priority and others discarded for the time being as irrelevant. The "clarity" which develops reduces the potentialities for role conflict and releases the energies of persons to play the critical and relevant roles necessary for the emergency. The explanation for the absence of conflict between family and other roles lies in the rather dramatic structural simplification which occurs in major emergencies. In addition, even traditional role scripts are not seen by incumbents as rigid and constraining necessities for standardized behavior. They are able to adapt such scripts to the specific situation. Often the family becomes a "natural" decision-making unit in making allocative decisions. A dependent wife/mother might continue to assume child care responsibilities while an independent wife/mother might encourage grandparents or neighbors to assume this responsibility so that she might assume some other role relevant to emergency action. Both such persons would see such activity within their pre-disaster conception of the role. The traditional conceptualization was predicated on the notion that family obligations would prevent that person from "occupying" some other role position. The family's gain is the job's loss. Many role positions, however, within a community are irrelevant to the emergency. With these roles no longer requiring persons to play them, these persons can "play" the relevant ones with a greater degree of effectiveness. The more significant problem in emergencies is that there are more persons willing to assume roles than there are relevant roles to assume. The "problem" then is not role conflict but how to incorporate "masses" of people who seek relevant roles into role structures which involve relevant tasks.<sup>1</sup> It is to these issues we now turn.

New Tasks and the Development of New Roles

While much of the early disaster research used the concept of role as an incidental descriptor of social categories among ~victim~ populations, none of these researchers described the category of ~victim~ as constituting a role. Subsequent research shifted away from ~victim~ studies to a much more social organizational approach focusing on the responding community and the organizational network involved in that response. This shift was facilitated by Barton's (1970) classic synthesis of the earlier work as well as the beginnings of the intentional commitment to such an orientation by the initial efforts of the Disaster Research Center. This shift in orientation, however, meant that there was only incidental attention given to familial roles. Roles were only one dimension among many of emergency organizations. The dominant focus was on organizations within the larger community system.

Elements of that larger system, however, were seen as flexible, emergent and dynamic. For example, Barton talked about the emergence of an ~emergency social system" which he said "operated by organizing some behavior into roles, organizing roles into subsystems, organizing some subsystems into large organizations and manipulating aggregates of individual and system behaviors" (1970:126). Much of the DRC research was bounded by notions of the development of emergency consensus, changes in community priorities, the importance of traditional and non-traditional forms of organization as well as the importance of emergent groups. All of these ideas implied some form of structural transformation in emergencies. It is conceivable that, with an interactionist perspective, one could understand how "behavior becomes organized in roles."

Some interesting clues come from the work of Taylor, Zurcher and Key (1970) on a tornado in Topeka, Kansas. These authors had been engaged in various other social psychological research in Topeka at the time of the tornado. Each of the scholars became personally involved in various ways in the recovery process. Combining their personal involvement with their social psychological orientation, they were able to generate interesting insights into the subtle interactional process which created new roles. Others might have conceptualized such processes as idiosyncratic or random behavior. They suggest that the disaster agent--the tornado--changed and disrupted, not only the physical world, but also the social world for many people. These people were confronted with new situations and problems for which their existing roles were not particularly applicable. In particular, Taylor et al imply that a disaster with a sudden impact inevitably creates a new process of social differentiation by making a social division between those who are directly affected and those who are untouched. This differentiation is not a matter of simple physical impact but it has to be socially defined. Victims need to come to see themselves as victims. In large part, that definition of victim comes from those who appear on the scene as "helpers." In other words, victims are given a role to play by helpers. In turn, it is impossible to be a helper without any victims.<sup>2</sup>

One can develop a scenario to illustrate the process in the following way. A tornado strikes a row of housing and several persons are pulled out of the rubble by friends and neighbors. The very pulling out by others already structures a dependency situation since those who do the pulling are in control. For some "victims" might resist and insist "I'm all right." The helpers may respond that "you only think you are." Such a perception is reinforced by the "common knowledge" that people are crazed and dazed in disasters. (This view may also be reinforced by mental health professionals

who later wish to provide help and reassurance.) The key dimension, however, in the victimization process is to create a dependent relationship on a growing circle of helpers. For some victims, this assumption of dependency may be easy since this theme may reflect their pre-disaster roles. For example, children and the aged may accept the victim role more readily. On the other hand, some may resist becoming a victim, even strenuously. That resistance may be interpreted by the helpers as confirming their "need" to be dependent.

The desire to maintain one's independence in the face of the definitions of others can be softened by turning to close friends or relatives. This places that dependency within the usual kin and friendship relationships. This may be much more acceptable than to seek or even accept "impersonal" aid from disaster agencies. Taylor et al suggest that victims often engage in various types of role bargaining--by accepting less assistance than is offered or by refusing certain conditions. Such reluctance minimizes the control that helpers can exercise but a "victim" is not in a strong position to bargain very effectively, especially when the labeling process begins to extend beyond the immediate neighborhood. Often~ the only defense against victimization is to develop and express hostility toward the "outsiders"--the sightseers, the "government," various helping agencies and perhaps the media. Most disaster events become the focus of media attention. Interviews with victims offer the opportunity for self comparisons with media-selected victims and to observe other victims. As the news spreads, far away relatives and friends electronically communicate their sympathy and are usually reluctant to accept disclaimers of the personal health and safety of victims as false claims of reassurance. While there may be great reluctance to play the victim role, victims are always outnumbered by those who wish to help. Consequently, it is sometimes easier to accept the role and behave in appropriate ways than it is to resist.

This is particularly true when the persons given that role have some behavior continuity of victim status with pre-disaster role relationships characterized by dependency.

It is clear that the creation of the victim role is dependent on the creation of the helper role. Sudden impact events create also the opportunity to assume a helper role. By contrast, this new role is much more rewarding than being a victim. Helping is socially valued normally and, in the emergency consensus, its value is increased. This makes it much less difficult to "recruit" people for the role. As we have already indicated, the impact creates a new situation for which few norms exist to guide immediate action. Everyone--victims and helpers--go through the process of defining the situation. This definitional process may be initially marked by somewhat random behavior which more psychologically oriented persons often describe as the disaster syndrome--people being stunned and dazed. Taylor et al describe what they call a role "moratorium" when old roles are suspended. In that "vacuum," new "ephemeral" roles can be acquired. If one is not a victim, e.g. under debris and hurt, then one can be a helper. The opportunities to become a helper is most closely related to being in close proximity to victims. Geographical proximity is often reinforced by interfamily and interpersonal ties. For example, Form and Nosow (1958:117) found that only 10 percent of search and rescue opportunities involved solitary activity; 24 percent involved organizational activity: 34 percent involved working with strangers but 69 percent involved working with friends and acquaintances. (Some persons worked in several different work settings.) In general, research has consistently shown that search and rescue activity is done by persons in the impact area. Such persons can more easily assume a helping role since they have access to the victims. In the process of helping, both the helper and the victim role expectations reinforce one another.

The dyadic relationship and the roles involved are "ephemeral" for major reasons. First, in most disasters, there is an exhaustible supply of victims. Second, helping roles quickly move toward a more complex set of role relations, communications patterns and authority relationships. One person "uncovers" a victim and is joined by another helper and then another. They begin to develop a division of labor and new ways of "organizing" their work. Some helpers assume more responsibility and perhaps become "leaders". If the necessity for helping continues, such an "ephemeral" group will meet with other more "organized" groups with additional resources of skill and equipment. Earlier role arrangements often are absorbed into this more formal structure.

Playing the roles in this dyadic relation have quite different consequences of the actors. There is the strong suggestion that there is considerable reluctance to play the victim role as well as a reluctance to continue to play the role. There are internal motivations on the part of the victims to mobilize their energies and resources to find solutions to the problems which initiated the process of victimization. Significant others also exert pressures to move them to the recovery process. There are interesting parallels here with discussions in the literature of medical sociology on the sick role, since that victim role is assumed to be a temporary one. Remaining in that role indicates a much deeper set of problems, involving the pathological aspects of dependency.

The helping role is also short lived since it becomes irrelevant or institutionalized. Tayler et al report that those who played that role commented that their identities created through their earlier pre-disaster roles were laid aside during that time. Earlier status positions were irrelevant and there was a satisfying pleasure derived from working together with others based on common tasks rather than by previous role definitions. What emerges might be called the "exhilaration of role anonymity." Previous

identities were dropped and the communications pattern focuses on the common tasks and there was a conspiracy of silence about the pre-disaster positions of the participants in the new role set. This process is well described in Zurcher's (1968) discussion of the emergence and operation of a work crew.

There were gains to those who had participated. There was the "release" from traditional roles--some of which might have been onerous but all of which had been familiar and routine, perhaps somewhat like a quick trip to the beach in the middle of winter. There was the opportunity for new activity and even to express aggression--to fight back at the "tornado." This expresses both an uncomplicated view of the world and an endorsement of their own activity. The tornado had been bad but their helping had been good. That aggression could also be released at obstacles, such as disaster agencies, which got in the way of their "good." The interaction between victims and helpers are able to "flow" without the impediments of social distinctions and bureaucratic procedures.

That new role set then forms a new social relationship, largely unintegrated into the pre-disaster social structure and somewhat tangential to the "organized" emergency response. The process of creating it, especially by those in the helping role, is felt to be personally satisfying and such an opportunity for role creation is rare. In fact, it is quite likely that disasters offer one of the few opportunities in modern society for such creation. Too, many disaster agents and most disaster impacts do not create the conditions which produce enough "victims" to necessitate the emergence of extensive helping roles. Most helping roles are already encompassed within existing social structures. The entry of persons into such roles is not achieved by direct contact with victims but through contact with organizations which have a legitimate and prior claim within the community to organize helping roles. Many of these organizations have regularly scripted roles for helping. Others have latent scripts ready for

such emergencies. Consequently, the relationship between pre-disaster organizational roles and the adaptations necessary in emergencies becomes the next topic for discussion.

#### The Adaptation of Organizational Roles

One attempt to look at role definitions and relationships in the disaster context is found in Dynes (1970; Chapters 6,7). Working with what has been called the oRC typology of organized groups, the discussion of the mobilization and recruitment of personnel provide clues to the dynamics of roles which add to the previous discussion. The intent of the typology was to account for the range of organizational involvement in disasters. The typology was based on a cross classification of structure and tasks. Type I is an established organization carrying out regular tasks such as a police department maintaining security at an impact zone. Type II is an expanding organization with regular tasks, e.g., Red Cross personnel, paid and volunteer, who are running a hurricane shelter. Type III is an extending organization which undertakes non-regular tasks, such as a construction company assisting in debris clearance. Type IV is an emergent group engaging in non regular tasks, such as an ad hoc search and rescue group or an emergent coordination group. Each of these different types have a different set of "problems" related to role and, in particular to the mixture of traditional and emergent elements within its role structure.

Type I (Established) Organizations. In such organizations, the traditional expectations of the roles persist to provide initial guidance for those who are organizational members. In para-military groups, such as police and fire departments, role expectations may be rather rigidly defined. Built into those expectations is the obligation of the organization and those who occupy the roles to function in emergencies.

Notification and call up procedures are in force. Filling "vacant" organizational positions is anticipated. Prior planning and organizational need clarifies potential conflicting obligations. The role system is well integrated and role relationships are familiar. A sense of obligations have developed as to maintaining the reciprocity of those relationships. The capacity to fill vacant positions exists. Consequently, personnel are both organizationally and self motivated to fulfill their role obligations. Role abandonment is non-existent. Role strain is minimal and role conflict is irrelevant.

The "dominant" role problem here is the potential rigidity of role expectations in restricting disaster obligations to the traditional domain of the organization. For example, fire department members may be reluctant to become involved in massive search and rescue efforts in order to maintain fire readiness. This stance is often taken in the "absence" of fires or even their high probability. At times, such organizations become involved in unfamiliar tasks in the early stages of the emergency period simply because they can mobilize significant personnel resources quickly. In what, at times, is a vacuum of activity of other organizations, established organizations may extend their domains and accept unfamiliar tasks. The fact that they pull back from these domain extensions quickly suggests the clarity of the role responsibilities which are internalized by the members of such organizations. In addition, such established organizations often have difficulty in their involvement in interorganizational relations, created by the complexity of involvement in emergencies. Their relationship with other established organizations is usually well institutionalized but they have considerable difficulty in dealing with groups which previously have been beyond their traditional scope of operations. That these organizations have difficulty with any role innovation is suggested by the fact that they have great difficulty in absorbing volunteers. As such,

these organizations are self contained and have self sufficient role systems. The roles are clear. Tasks and procedures are well institutionalized. Mobilization of personnel is expedient and effective. A major factor in this organizational effectiveness is the narrowed scope of activities which they assume and the ways they reject additional tasks and personnel in emergencies.

Type II (Expanding) Organizations. Such organizations are characterized by a small permanent cadre which is supplemented by a variety of volunteers. Some of the permanent cadre continue to play traditional roles in an emergency while other members of the cadre assume latent emergency roles. While such positions are "new" for the emergency, these persons occupying them have knowledge of the pre-disaster role arrangements and the anticipated role scripting. In contrast to Type I organizations, some of the permanent cadre are in new and untested roles which can create ambiguity.

The complexity of Type II organizations can be appreciated when volunteers are added to the traditional and latent roles of the permanent staff. Volunteers are not a homogeneous category. It will be recalled that the possibilities for the creation of new roles are quite limited. The victim-helper dyad is in part dependent on the number of victims and it is also short lived and soon becomes absorbed by Type II organizations. Type II organizations are not as directly limited by the extent of victimization since their organizational legitimacy is based on anticipating potential problems rather than dealing with actual ones. These organizational types then absorb the excess "helpers" and provide an embryonic structure to mobilize them. Some of these volunteers will have had previous ties to the organization and skills relevant to the disaster role. There are a minimum of roles, however, for this category of volunteer (See Figure 1). Such a volunteer has latent role clarity--determined prior to the emergency and what might be called latent socialization based on earlier experience. This

type might be illustrated by a regular nurse volunteer who had retired from regular nursing assignments but wishes to contribute her services in an emergency. Her motivation, earlier training and present skill in doing similar tasks makes for an easy transition to her emergency role. More complex, however, is another category of volunteers who are in the process of what might be called role-seeking. This might also be a nurse with relevant skills but no previous organizational ties. Such a person, usually known as a walk-in, might easily adapt to the medical-nursing aspect of the responsibility. Another type of role seeker might be identified as those who have no immediately relevant emergency skills but who find an unoccupied role or create a needed role. Using our same organizational example, some person, known to members of the organization, is "recruited" to handle supplies for a hurricane shelter. That person could be "trusted" and has sufficient knowledge to know who to ask for information and authority. Such a person is often a free-lance operative with apparent organizational authority. Such authority, of course, may be more apparent than real but the assumption of authority may be timely and often is not questioned. The last category is the complete free lance, with no previous organizational ties and no immediately apparent skills. These could be emergent search and rescue groups which have developed spontaneously and gradually are organizationally absorbed. Absorbed may be too strong a word. Many such groups attach themselves to existing community groups to gain legitimacy for their own chosen and self-directed activity. Sometimes, a Red Cross sign or a shoulder insignia provides an "illusion" of organizational connection of which the permanent cadre may not be aware.

Obviously, the organizational boundaries for Type II are extensive and elastic. The role structure is a combination of permanent, latent and emergent elements and various organizational segments might evidence different mixes of those elements. Its organizational domain is more

ambiguous and even those intended limits may not be known to most volunteers. Such organizations are characterized, then, by role ambiguity and confusion. Communication and authority patterns are problematic as is organizational control and responsibility. On the other hand, such organizations are designed for their flexibility and, in a rapidly changing situation, flexibility is of prime importance. Such organizations are also the focus of post-disaster criticism and much of that derives from dealing with tasks which are rejected by Type I organizations.

Even with the flexibility of Type II organizations, not all volunteers can be absorbed within its flexible and perhaps chaotic structure. Since people are released from other now-irrelevant roles obligations within the community, most Type II organizations are overwhelmed with volunteers. Being "rejected" with a high motivation to help is always ego deflating. So many go "home," not as a consequence of role conflict and a desire for some familial retreat, but simply because there are, in aggregate, more people willing to fill helping roles than can be institutionalized in the relatively short period of the emergency.

Type III (Extending) organizations solve some of the volunteer problems in another way. While such organizations have no immediate disaster responsibility, they find entry into the emergency system in certain specified situations. This is a much more painless way to avoid individual role seeking. Existing organizations can "volunteer" en masse. For example, boy scout groups can operate message centers; construction companies can become involved in debris clearance; church groups can maintain shelter operations, etc. The pattern of existing role relationships within these organizations can be adapted to the emergency situation. The same communication and authority structure can be

Figure 1

Role Problems of Volunteers in Expanding Organizations

Relevant Skills and Experience

Yes

No

Yes Latent Role Clarity  
Latent socialization

Role Seeking-  
finding an organization niche

Previous Organiza-  
tional Ties

No Role Seeking-  
finding skill  
appropriate role

Role Creation and Innovation  
or  
Rejection and withdrawal

maintained. The major role ambiguity may stem from the details of the relationship between the extending and the "host" organization. If such organizations become a "part" of Type II organizations, the question of boundaries and autonomy may become problematic. It is the impression here that the degree of involvement of extending organizations is often limited and specific so the "problematic" aspect occurs at the interorganizational level rather than within the internal role structure.

Type IV (Emergent) groups. These groups have no pre-disaster existence and, therefore, no continuity of roles to pre-disaster times. In certain ways, they are more complex examples of the victim-helper dyad. Such groups emerge at the intersections of the more formalized and informal segments of the community. While they have no pre-disaster existence, the development of such groups is rooted in earlier friendship patterns or upon formal positions within the organizations involved in the emergency. While they are emergent, they are not ad hoc since their composition can be predicted with some accuracy. One way to visualize the "need" for such groups is to point out that most modern communities have developed a segmented and deliberative approach to the "solution" of everyday community problems. Emergencies, such as disasters, create the need for a speedy and unified approach. These groups emerge to implement that need. Some sub-segments bring with them a history of pre-disaster relationships. Others bring past experience in forging new relationships. Extensive organizational experience is the major qualification for entry into these groups and it serves as the major basis for the creation of a new role structure. Some of the same exhilaration that others find in creating new roles can be found among those who help create the group role structure. The participants, however, already possess organizational skills, and they are not selected by geographical proximity to victims, but by role experience in relevant disaster organizations.<sup>3</sup>

In effect, the emergency response in disaster is an interesting amalgam. There is the persistence of traditional roles and their utility in the "new" situation. Some traditional roles serve as the base, either through planning or through happenstance, for role adaptations to fit the new situation. In relatively few situations which have scant pre-disaster parallels, new roles are created. Most of these are short lived to *fill* a momentary or transient need. Some emergent groups take as their mission bridging the organizational complexity and shortening the time necessary for traditional decision making. There are definite limits on the scope of role creation. There are also limits as to how many new roles are needed. Since many people are released from most nondisaster role obligations, there is a significant imbalance between those motivated to help and the number of roles which allow helping.

#### Summary and Conclusion

At the end, we must return to the beginning to underscore some central points about roles. 80th interactionist and structural approaches provide different levels of understanding in particular segments of the disaster. From an interactionist perspective, there are occasions when roles are created to guide behavior in "structural" gaps. The creation of the helper-victim dyad out of interaction copes with a temporarily unstructured situation. There is a certain amount of role innovation and adaptation in expanding and emergent groups. These innovations use base elements of the existing structure and supplement them through the interaction process to cope with "new" tasks. Some of these innovations can, in part, be anticipated. Emergency planning tries to anticipate needed behavior and develops latent roles. One would judge that his planning process is useful if *it* does not attempt to change traditional role behavior too radically.

Many of the problems of such planning are not in the new scripting but in the failure to anticipate the consequences of such adaptations for the increased complexity of the role relationships which result. This might be called the "positional fallacy" since it is necessary to deal with role systems, rather than positions.

Perhaps the most important lesson for roles which comes from disaster is the observation that it is possible to have rather rapid and temporary structural changes which simplify role systems. Several people have pointed to this aspect in different ways. Taylor et al talk about a "role moratorium" and much of the ORe research conceptualizes this as the development of an emergency consensus. This implies that many traditional positions and roles become irrelevant and are put on hold. There is an implicit agreement which emerges that certain tasks and certain roles should have priority to guide the energies of the human resources within the community. This process virtually eliminates the widely anticipated problem of role conflict since it reduces the structural possibilities for it.

On a more methodological conclusion, the disaster context suggests that it is not useful to try to predict role behavior from the knowledge of position, nor is it useful to ask people to predict their role expectations in disaster and then use this to interpolate what their behavior will be like. This might be possible to predict simple, and thus unimportant, behaviors or immediate and familiar actions but such methods are clearly inappropriate for complex and infrequent actions, anticipated for some distant future. Role behavior in disaster is best observed in action, since that action provides a realistic context for both the actor and the researcher.

NOTES

There are several other variables which might be important in the analysis of role "conflict" which are not considered here. First, the nature of the disaster agent might be important. One might hypothesize that role "conflict" or strain might be more characteristic in slow onset and diffuse disasters. That strain, however, may be based on the greater ambiguity of occupational responsibilities in such emergencies. Second, it might be hypothesized that the lack of emergency planning may create more role conflict. Many of the earlier studies were conducted when emergency planning was embryonic, but the investigators usually assumed that emergency obligations were normative or, or least, should have been. Third, another important contextual variable for role conflict is the "type" of society and its characteristic role structure. The whole issue of role "conflict" is predicated on functionally specific roles, characteristic only of industrialized societies. Such an analysis is almost irrelevant in "developing" societies. However, it might be useful to conceptualize role conflict in those societies in terms of the functionally specific roles of Western relief agencies contrasted with the familistic functionally diffuse roles of victim populations. These differing role definitions result in a struggle between the aims of efficiency by the donors and the claims of autonomy by the recipients. The usual outcomes of such role "conflict" are charges of corruptions by the donors and charges of imperialism by the recipients. The base of those charges, however, resides in differing role definitions and responsibilities.

That reciprocal relationship often has unanticipated consequences. One might argue that the usual overestimation of impact, especially in estimates of the number of dead and injured is "necessary" in order to mobilize a response which, in most instances, is an overresponse. In addition, this also may relate to instances of competition among organizations to "obtain" enough victims to justify their entry into the emergency system.

The analysis here treats each type of reorganization as if all roles were subject to "identical" influences. Obviously, organizations differ in the degree of role specialization and complexity and these variables might result in different role performances in emergencies. For example, Stallings, (1970) found some difference in the "speed" of reporting among hospital personnel after a slow onset disaster. Medically related personnel reported more quickly than did operations and maintenance personnel.. However, it was not clear whether that earlier reporting led to unnecessary duplication or improved efficiency.

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