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Role Theory

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Introduction

Concepts of role theory can be traced back to before 1900, although the use of the term 'role' only became common in the 1930s (for more on the origin of role theory see Biddle and Thomas in *Role Theory: Concepts and Research*, referred to in *General Overviews*). The basic idea is that individuals have various roles in life and that these roles come with prescriptions on how individuals should behave. Banton defines a role in *The Social Science Encyclopedia (2nd Edition)* as "the expected behaviour associated with a social position" (p. 749, discussed in *General Overviews*). A social position (also referred to as a social status) is defined by Merton in *The role-set: Problems in sociological theory* as "a position in a social system involving designated rights and obligations" (p. 110, referred to in *Additional General Terminology*). Although this basic concept has mostly remained the same over different studies throughout the years (with some exceptions), role theory has developed a lot over time and many studies have been written in response to weaknesses in earlier descriptions. For example, the theory of role accumulation was developed in response to the focus of the theory of role strain on the negative sides of participating in multiple roles (both described in *Multiple Roles*). Also, the term 'role' is sometimes broadened to also include social status and to include exhibited behaviour in addition to expected behaviour (George in *Sociological perspectives on*

life transitions; discussed in *Critics*). As such, one cannot speak of one role theory, but only of a collection of role theories. Role theory has inspired, and continues to inspire, much research.

General Overviews

There exist several texts on what role theory is and how it developed over time. Probably the first book that tried to combine various independent texts into one coherent piece on the basics of role theory is Biddle and Thomas 1966. Biddle 1986 gives an excellent overview on how the field has developed in various directions and how different theorists and researchers look differently at core concepts of role theory. Turner 2001 provides a more modern account on what role theory is and how it is developing. Good short introductions also include encyclopaedia entries in the *International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family* 2003 and the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* 2008. How the word 'role' is used in social science research can be found in Banton 1996.

Banton, Michael. 1996. Role. In: Kuper, Adam and Jessica Kuper (eds). *The Social Science Encyclopedia. (2nd Edition)*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

This entry in the encyclopedia describes the use of the word role in social science research. It is a clear but rather broad description.

Biddle, Bruce J. 1986. Recent development in role theory. *Annual Review of Sociology* 12: 67-92.

This paper describes the difficulties that role theory was having and how multiple perspectives on role theory have emerged. It includes key concepts of role theory that seem to be overarching these different perspectives. It also gives several critics on role theory, the different perspectives in role theory, and various key concepts. Hence, this paper is an excellent way of understanding how various conceptualisations of role theory relate to one another.

Biddle, Bruce J. and Edwin J. Thomas (eds). 1966. *Role Theory: Concepts and Research*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

This book starts with four chapters trying to combine the then current knowledge of role theory in an overview of basic concepts and knowledge. The following 47 chapters are selected papers on role theory to give insight in the breadth and depth of studies on role theory. Also contains a bibliography of about 250 references that contributed to role theory.

Turner, Jonathan, H. (Ed.). 2001. *Handbook of Sociological Theory*. New York: Springer Science+Business Media, LLC.

This book contains a couple of chapters that discuss role theory. Where Sheldon Stryker in Chapter 11 mostly discusses structural role theory and its relation to traditional and structural symbolic interactionism, Ralph Turner looks in Chapter 12 more at interactional role theory. This handbook has a special focus on current developments in theory.

****Role Theory**[<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3406900365.html>]*." *International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family*. 2003. Retrieved 13 July 2015.

This entry shortly describes the structural and interactionist approach to role theory as well as accumulating and changing roles. It applies the theory mainly to the mother role. Good short introduction to role theory with a specific application.

****Role Theory**[<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3045302300.html>]*." *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. 2008. Retrieved 13 July 2015.

This entry provides a short historical overview of role theory, describing first the structural and interactionist schools of thought and then how these were integrated after the 1980s.

Origins

For an overview of predecessors of role theory, see Biddle and Thomas 1966 (referred to in *General Overviews*). They point, however, to three main theorists that contributed probably more than any other to the creation of role theory. First, Mead 1972 is a main source. He is considered one of the principal founders of symbolic interactionism. For an account of this theoretical perspective, see ****Symbolic Interactionism**[obo-9780199756384-0061]**, for symbolic interactionism in combination with sociological social psychology see ****Social Psychology**[obo-9780199756384-0069]**, and for more on the work of Mead see ****G. H. Mead**[obo-9780199756384-0141]**. Second, role theory is often explained in terms of performances of roles in a theatre. Elucidating the performance of roles, Moreno 1934 distinguishes role taking from role playing. In role taking, the role is established and there is no freedom for the individual in how the role is performed. When playing a role, however, there is freedom for the individual to interpret the role. This perspective is clearly distinct from Mead's that was criticized in Moreno 1960. Goffman 1959 is another example of linking to theatrical performance and the dramaturgical metaphor. Third, Linton 1936 distinguishes status from role. A role is perceived by Linton as the dynamic aspect of a status.

Bianchi, Alison. Social Psychology. In *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Sociology*. Accessed 18-Feb-2015.

Gives information about sociological social psychology. Role theory is related to several of the works of social psychologists. This source is good for seeing its relation to social psychology more generally. Available ***online**[<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0069.xml>] by subscription.

Carreira da Silva, Filipe. G.H. Mead. In *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Sociology*. Accessed 18-Feb-2015).

Provides an overview of the work of Mead as well as the relationship between Mead and symbolic interactionism. Available

***online**[<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0141.xml>] by subscription.

Fine, Gary and Kent Sandstrom. Symbolic Interactionism. In *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Sociology*, (accessed 18-Feb-2015).

Good starting point for readers interested in symbolic interactionism. Available *online[<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0061.xml> by subscription.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: Penguin Books.

Goffman comes from the perspective of theoretical performance and dramaturgy. Explains in detail how individuals and teams play out roles in various settings. Examples come from various fields where role theory still plays a big role such as gender roles and business roles.

Linton, Ralph. 1936. *The study of man*. United States of America: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Linton distinguishes statuses (which are described as a “collection of rights and duties” (p. 113)) from roles (putting the rights and duties into effect) but emphasizes the close relationship between the two. People have multiple statuses and roles. Book also distinguishes ascribed from achieved statuses. Considered a classic on roles in society.

Mead, George H. (edited and with introduction by Charles W. Morris) [1934]1972. *Mind, Self, and Society. From the standpoint of a social behaviourist*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

This book is seen as one of the foundations of symbolic interactionism and role theory. It is written for a large part based on notes of students, together with notes and unpublished manuscripts of Mead. The book already describes taking a role and the importance of the generalized other. Originally published in 1934.

Moreno, Jacob L. [1934]2013. *Who Shall Survive? A New Approach To The Problem Of Human Interrelations*. New Delhi: Isha Books.

This book is seen as one of the first books on role theory. Although it already discusses roles and perceives role taking differently from Mead, this is done far less explicitly than in his 1960 book, also discussed in this section. Originally published in 1934.

Moreno, Jacob L. 1960. *The Sociometry Reader*. Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe.

This book contains a chapter on role but references to role theory come back at several places in the book. Moreno makes the important distinction between role-taking, role-playing, and role-creating. It also distinguishes three types of roles: psychosomatic roles, psychodramatic roles, and social roles. This book is more explicit on role theory.

Additional General Terminology

Role theory is not one theory and it has developed a lot over time with different researchers focussing on different parts and developing new concepts that are added to the theory and adopted by some researchers and not by others. For example, Turner 1956 focused on the concept of role taking and described various forms of this concept. Another important concept Turner 1978 developed is role merger. Merton 1957 developed the concept of a 'role-set', which points to the important fact that different people can have different expectations on how someone in a certain social position should behave.

Merton, Robert K. 1957. The role-set: Problems in sociological theory. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 8(2): 106-120.

In this paper, Merton brings the insight that social statuses do not come with a single role but with multiple roles attached to it. Social statuses are structurally related to one another and occupants of different social statuses may have different expectations on how someone should enact the role of one particular social status. This in turn is considered a potential source of conflict. The paper discusses several ways in which role-sets are likely to *not* lead to conflict.

Turner, Ralph H. 1956. Role-taking, role standpoint, and reference-group behaviour. *American Journal of Sociology*, 61(4): 316-328.

This theoretical article looks at various types of role-taking, developing this part of role theory. Turner also describes why it is important to distinguish these various types and how it relates to concepts of empathy and reference-group behaviour.

Turner, Ralph H. 1978. The role and the person. *American Journal of Sociology*, 84(1): 1-23.

This is also a theoretical article that in several steps looks at the distinction between person and role, when the two merge, and what determines merger. It deals, thus, with the distinction between playing a role and becoming that role. Turner describes how this can lead to problems when merging with one role may affect participating in other roles and how role merging relates to personality formation.

Beyond Interactionalism versus Structuralism

Two different schools of thought are commonly referred to when discussing role theory. The structuralist view takes the context as the starting point and roles are seen as influencing the behaviour of individuals. Prominent names in this school of thought are Linton (discussed in *Origins*), Parsons & Shils 2008, and Stryker (in the Handbook of Sociological Theory discussed in *General Overviews*). The interactionist view sees roles as adapted and acted out through interaction between individuals. Important names in this school of thought are Goffman (discussed in *Origins*) and Ralph Turner (in the Handbook of Sociological Theory discussed in *General Overviews*). Since the 1980s, there has been a call to combine the two perspectives, acknowledging that the society contains structures that influence individuals, but that individuals also have degrees of

freedom in how they act out their role and that roles are developed through interactions. Some important readings in this respect include Callero 1994, Hilbert 1981, and Stryker 2002.

Callero, Peter L. 1994. From role-playing to role-using: Understanding role as resource. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 57(3): 228-243.

In this paper, Callero proposes an alternative to more traditional role theory by viewing a role not as behavioural expectations that come with a certain position in society, but as a cultural object that can be used as a resource to attain such a position. Although researchers have cited this work, it has not replaced more traditional role theory perspectives.

Hilbert, Richard A. 1981. Toward an improved understanding of "role". *Theory and Society*, 10(2): 207-226.

This article shortly but clearly describes the functionalist and interactionist understanding of role theory and explains how they are less dissimilar than often assumed. Then, this article describes an alternative conceptualization of roles.

Parsons, Talcott and Edward A. Shils. [1951]2008. The Social System. In: Parsons, Talcott & Edward A. Shils *Toward a General Theory of Action: Theoretical Foundations for the Social Sciences*. New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers.

In this chapter, Parsons and Shils describe social organization. They describe the conceptual unit of this to be the role. It is considered a standard work in the structural variant of role theory. Originally published in 1951.

Stryker, Sheldon. [1980]2002. *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version*. New Jersey: The Blackburn Press.

In this book Stryker explains his version of symbolic interactionism. He combines symbolic interactionism with concepts of role theory to deal with the interaction between person and structure. Originally published in 1980.

Critics

There is not one version of role theory and critics may be more or less applicable to various types of role theory. George 1993 describes three important critics on role theory. First, the theory seems to be very broad and general, making it difficult to falsify. Second, the role of time is insufficiently taken into account. Third, heterogeneity is not considered enough (see Granovetter 1985 for a similar argument). Callero 1994 (discussed in *Beyond Interactionism versus Structuralism*) and McCall & Simmons 1978 criticize the more structural types of role theory for not taking agency enough into account. The more structural version of role theory is also criticized, for example by Callero 1994 (discussed in *Beyond Interactionism versus Structuralism*) and Gerhardt 1980, for not being able to explain dynamics of power or how the structural context came into existence. Further, it has been claimed – for example by West and Zimmerman 1987 – that role theory is ahistorical as well as

depoliticizing and that it has too much emphasis on stable, continuing roles over which exist consensus. There are also some more specific critiques on what should be seen as a role. In Lopata & Thorne 1978 and West & Zimmerman 1987, one can find arguments against seeing 'gender' as a role; it is qualitatively different from other roles, such as 'parent', 'doctor' or 'student', it ignores questions on inequality or power, and seeing gender as a role makes it more difficult to see how gender affects performance in other roles. Similar arguments can be made for other demographic categories as age or ethnicity. Komarovsky 1992 provides arguments against many of these criticisms.

George, Linda K. 1993. Sociological perspectives on life transitions. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 19: 353-373.

Describes role theory as one of the foundations of life transition research. George looks at role theory, social stress theory, and life course sociology to come to the recommendation that all three perspectives should be combined.

Gerhardt, Uta. 1980. Towards a critical analysis of role. *Social Problems*, 27(5): 556-569.

This article uses the Frankfurt School as background and takes a critical perspective on role. Rather than denouncing the concept of 'role' altogether, this article assesses how it can be used in the critical theory approach and sets this against other usages of 'role'.

Granovetter, Mark. 1985. Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness. *American Journal of Sociology*, 91(3): 481-510.

Describes the problems of oversocialized and undersocialized conceptions of human action. Granovetter criticizes role theory in relation to oversocialization and claims that it does not put enough emphasis on the individual content of the role that actors perform. He argues instead for seeing individual actors embedded in social relations in order to avoid both over- and undersocialized concepts of human action.

Komarovsky, Mirra. 1992. The concept of social role revisited. *Gender and Society*, 6(2): 301-313.

This article describes various arguments against criticisms to the use of gender roles. Although focussing on gender roles, the arguments mentioned here are broader than gender roles alone. It discusses how role theory can be used in sociological research.

Lopata, Helena Z. and Barrie Thorne. 1978. On the term "sex roles". *Signs*, 3(3): 718-721.

This short entry describes several problems with the term sex (or gender) roles.

McCall, George J. and Jerry L. Simmons. 1978. *Identities and Interactions: An Examination of Human Associations in Everyday Life. Revised Edition*. New York: The Free Press.

In this book, McCall and Simmons describe their theoretical approach. Although they also use the term 'role' they clearly distinguish this from role theory. They disagree with role theory that roles are clearly defined and claim that roles must be improvised rather than performed.

West, Candace and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. Doing gender. *Gender and Society*, 1(2), 125-151.

A now classic paper. It questions the usefulness of perceiving gender as a role and instead claims that gender is something that individuals 'do' through interaction.

Multiple Roles

Individuals do not just perform one role in their lives and several theories and empirical studies have been published on the combination of roles. Thoits 1983 relates roles to social identities and psychological well-being. As Thoits 1983: 175 explains in the identity accumulation hypothesis, "if one knows who one is (in a social sense), then one knows how to behave". She describes that the "greater the number of identities held, the stronger one's sense of meaningful, guided existence", which is important for psychological well-being. There is discussion in the literature about whether participating in multiple roles is positive or negative for psychological well-being. First, there is the theory of role strain, explained in Goode 1960, which focuses on difficulties to meet role demands. Sieber 1974 describes two main sources of why participating in multiple roles can lead to role strain: role overload as a consequence of time restrictions and role conflict because of different expectations that are related to different roles. That multiple roles should lead to role strain has long been contested, however. As a response to the focus on the negative side of having multiple roles, Sieber 1974 argues that before we can discuss the ways to relieve role strain, we should first establish that participating in multiple roles indeed leads to more negative than positive feelings. Many different terms have been used in research though. For an overview see Staines 1980. It now seems agreed among researchers that participating in multiple roles can both lead to conflict and to enhancement, although overall enhancement seems to win it from the conflict. Several theories have been developed to explain *under which conditions* multiple roles lead to positive or negative outcomes. For example, Marks 1977 points toward commitment. Marks and MacDermid 1996 later develop this in a theory of role balance. Although in general, Barnett and Hyde 2001 believe that participating in multiple roles would be positive for well-being, there are a number of processes that they describe that facilitate (or hinder) this. Also, they suggest that there is an upper limit in number of roles and time demands an individual can handle. This contrasts with Thoits 1983 view that the more roles individuals fulfil, the better for psychological well-being. Results are somewhat mixed on role conflict and role enhancement. There are several reasons for this. Looking at one specific type of role conflict, namely the conflict between the work and family roles, Kossek and Ozeki 1998 point towards differences in measurements and samples as explanation for such mixed results.

Barnett, Rosalind C. and Janet S. Hyde. 2001. Women, men, work, and family: An expansionist theory. *American Psychologist*, 56(10): 781-796.

The authors critique traditional gender theories. The paper's goal is to provide a new theory that would better fit the current time. The theory is based on four principles: (1) participating in multiple roles is, in general, positive for well-being; (2) there are several processes that contribute to this positive effect; (3) there are certain conditions under which this positive effect will occur; and (4) psychological gender differences are small and mutable.

Goode, William J. 1960. A theory of role strain. *American Sociological Review*, 25(4): 483-496.

Emphasizes role conflict that results from participating in multiple roles. Written in response to what Goode called the "Lintonian model" (p. 484) to deal with limitations of this model. The paper describes various types of role strain as well as two sets of mechanisms individuals can use to reduce role strain.

Kossek, Ellen E. and Cynthia Ozeki. 1998. Work-family conflict, policies, and the job-life satisfaction relationship: A review and directions for organizational behavior-human resources research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 83(2): 139-149.

This article presents a meta-analysis of published studies on work-family conflict to assess mixed findings on its relationship with satisfaction. It is highly cited and important for its considerations of measurement and attention to differences between subgroups.

Marks, Stephen R. 1977. Multiple roles and role strain: Some notes on human energy, time and commitment. *American Sociological Review*, 42(6): 921-936.

Explains the—at least at that time more dominant—scarcity approach of multiple roles and the weaknesses on this approach. Then, Marks explains the expansion approach and combines both approaches. Herewith, it is an important early integration of both points of view.

Marks, Stephen R. and Shelley M. MacDermid. 1996. Multiple roles and the self: A theory of role balance. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 58(2): 417-432.

Criticizes the assumption of hierarchy in roles as a way to deal with multiple roles and suggests an alternative, namely role balance. This article sets out the basic ideas of this theory and provides a first test based on two studies.

Siebert, Sam D. 1974. Toward a theory of role accumulation. *American Sociological Review*, 39(4): 567-578.

This paper provides an early critique of the focus on the negative consequences of participating in multiple roles. It describes four possible positive consequences of role accumulation: (1) role privileges, (2) overall status security, (3), resources for status enhancement and role performance, and (4) personality enrichment and ego gratification.

Staines, Graham L. 1980. Spillover versus compensation: A review of the literature on the relationship between work and nonwork. *Human Relations*, 33(2): 111-129.

This article is an early review of the literature on the positive versus negative side of combination of work and nonwork roles. In general, it finds more support for the positive side. It is an often-cited source for the spillover perspective. Although spillover is meant as positive spillover in this article, several other authors make a distinction between positive and negative spillover.

Thoits, Peggy A. 1983. Multiple identities and psychological well-being: A reformulation and test of the social isolation hypothesis. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2): 174-187.

Thoits explains the identity accumulation hypothesis, taking a positive view on combining multiple roles. She investigates the importance of integration or segregation of roles, and also tests some of her main ideas. Important paper for the way she theoretically describes how roles combine and how this relates to psychological well-being.

Work and Family Roles

The work and family role are often singled out in role domain research. Joseph Pleck 1977 is one of the first researchers stressing the importance of looking at the whole work-family role system. There is research on work-family conflict as well as work-family enrichment. Greenhaus and Powell 2006 stress the importance of distinguishing between work-to-family conflict/enrichment and family-to-work conflict/enrichment, emphasizing the bi-directionality of these relationships. Mills 2015 provides a recent overview on what is currently known about the work-family interface from a gender perspective. Greenhaus and Beutell 1985 is an important article that looks at the negative side of the work-family combination. This article reviewed the empirical knowledge thus far and gives a clear theoretical overview. Twenty years later, Byron 2005 provides a meta-analytical review. Another important review article of work-family conflict is from Bellavia and Frone 2005. There is quite some variation in terminology used to talk about the broader concept. For example, Frone 2003 uses work-family balance while Kossek & Lambert 2005 talk about work-family integration and Mills 2015 about the work-family experience.

Bellavia, Gina M. and Michael R. Frone. 2005. Work-family conflict. In: Julian Barling, E. Kevin Kelloway, and Michael R. Frone. *Handbook of Work Stress*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

This book chapter reviews literature on work-family conflict. It defines it, looks at the prevalence, gives the theoretical background, reviews important empirical studies, identifies predictors, outcomes, and moderators, discusses key measurement issues, provides the future research needs, and gives practical implications.

Byron, Kristen. 2005. A meta-analytic review of work-family conflict and its antecedents. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 67(2): 169-198.

Important overview on the antecedents of work-family conflict, showing that the direction of the conflict matters. Shows that the role of sex is not as simple as often predicted. Links the results back to theory and practice.

Frone, Michael R. 2003. Work-Family Balance. In: James C. Quick & Lois E. Tetrick (Eds). *Handbook of Occupational Health Psychology*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Reviews literature on work-family balance. His conceptualization of work-family balance is often used. The paper emphasizes the need to include both direction (work-to-family and family-to-work) and type (conflict versus facilitation) in research as well as the importance of looking at other roles than family roles next to work.

Greenhaus, Jeffrey H. and Nicholas J. Beutell. 1985. Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of Management Review*, 19(1): 76-88.

Provides a clear overview on what role conflict is and distinguishes three types: (1) time-based conflict; (2) strain-based conflict; and (3) behaviour-based conflict. This article remains a good introduction in work-family role conflict.

Greenhaus, Jeffrey H. and Gary N. Powell. 2006. When work and family are allies: A theory of work-family enrichment. *Academy of Management Review*, 31(1): 72-92.

To correct the fact that much research on work-family has taken a conflict perspective, this paper comes with a theory of work-family enrichment, which they define as “*the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in another role*” (p. 73). Describes previous research and proposes a theoretical model.

Kossek, Ellen E. and Susan J. Lambert (eds). 2005. *Work and Life Integration: Organizational, Cultural, and Individual Perspectives*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Role theory takes a central position in this book. The focus is on integration of work and family roles. Rather than focussing only on the individual, it also looks the organizational and cultural perspective.

Mills, Maura J. (Ed.). 2015. *Gender and the Work-Family Experience: An intersection of Two Domains*. Switzerland: Springer.

Each chapter in this edited volume is grounded in gender-role theory. It provides a recent overview on the current state of knowledge, discussing less researched topics such as the intersection of gender and race, men, and work-family guilt.

Pleck, Joseph H. 1977. The work-family role system. *Social Problems*, 24(4): 417-427.

Seminal paper on the importance of looking at the whole work-family role system, which includes both the male and the female work and family roles. Reviews literature on the

different relationships between these roles and gives more structural characteristics of the links between the roles.

Related Theories

On the positive side of the work-family combination, various theories have been proposed. For example, Greenhaus & Powell 2006 (discussed in *Work and Family Roles*) provide a theory on work-family enrichment; Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar 2007 a theory on work-family facilitation; Clark 2000 the work/family border theory; and Rothbard 2001 provides a model of work-family engagement. Next to research looking at the actual combination of work and family roles, Peake & Harris 2002 and Weitzman 1994 are examples of research focussing on multiple role *planning*.

Clark, Sue C. 2000. Work/family border theory: A new theory of work/family balance. *Human Relations*, 53(6): 747-770.

This highly cited article sets out the theory that explains when work/family balance is more or less likely to occur. It explains the main concepts and relates it to previous theories. Main concepts include border strength (which is determined by permeability, flexibility and blending), border-crossers (who differ in influence and role identification), and border-keepers and other domain members.

Peake, Amy and Karen L. Harris. 2002. Young adults' attitudes toward multiple role planning: The influence of gender, career traditionality, and marriage plans. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 60(3): 405-421.

This article tests Weitzman's theory on attitudes towards multiple role planning and extends the individual focus of previous research by looking at couples.

Rothbard, Nancy P. 2001. Enriching or depleting? The dynamics of engagement in work and family roles. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 46(4): 655-684.

In this article, Rothbard develops a model that explicitly investigates engagement in both work and family roles and tests the model on empirical data.

Wayne, Julie, H., Joseph G. Grzywacz, Dawn S. Carlson, and K. Michele Kacmar. 2007. Work-family facilitation: A theoretical explanation and model of primary antecedents and consequences. *Human Resource Management Review*, 17(1): 63-76.

This article steps away from an individualistic approach towards system level functioning. They define work-family facilitation as "*the extent to which an individual's engagement in one life domain (i.e., work/family) provides gains (i.e., developmental, affective, capital, or efficiency) which contribute to enhanced functioning of another life domain (i.e., family/work)*" (p. 64).

Weitzman, Lauren M. 1994. Multiple-role realism: A theoretical framework for the process of planning to combine career and family roles. *Applied & Preventive Psychology*, 3(1): 15-25.

This article sets out the theory of multiple-role realism. This is defined as “the recognition that multiple-role involvement is a complex and potentially stressful life-style, paired with awareness of the need for careful planning and consideration of the interface between work and family roles” (p. 16). It is thought to consist of attitudes toward multiple-role planning, multiple-role knowledge, and multiple-role planning.

Sex/Gender Role Theory

A related but different approach focuses on sex or gender roles (both terms can be found in the literature but are typically used to mean the same thing). Much of this research looks at gender role attitudes. Van der Horst 2014 gives a short introduction on this topic. Gender role attitudes is often used to refer to the perspective that more traditional attitudes see women as homemakers and men as breadwinners while more egalitarian attitudes are associated with a more equal division of tasks. Gender role attitudes can be measured both at the individual and at the group level. These attitudes are associated with actual divisions of tasks between partners. Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies exist on this topic. Some research, like Corrigan & Konrad 2007 and Kaufman 2000, looks at the direction of the relationship, trying to disentangle whether early attitudes affect later time investments or whether individuals cognitively reinterpret their time investments in their attitudes. Other research on gender role theory more broadly looks at roles that are considered more appropriate for men or women. For example, based on what is perceived more ‘male’ or ‘female’ domains, parents’ traditional gender role stereotypes are believed, and found, to be related to how well parents think their own daughter or son is performing in that domain (such as maths, sports, or English). Eccles, Jacobs, and Harold 1990, for example, show that this is in turn related to the child’s actual competence in these domains. Other research, such as discussed in Eagly and Karau 1991, works from the stereotypes of men as more agentic and women as more communal and assumes that men and women take up social roles that fit their gender role. Eagly and Karau 2002 developed a theory on role congruity between gender roles and leadership roles. Spence 1993 discusses how gender roles are related to gender identity and discusses various types of questionnaires. Fischer and Arnold 1994 discuss some of the confusion in terminology between gender identity and gender role attitudes. A specific subfield looks at gender role conflict of men. Research in this subfield assessed whether the gender role socialization of men according to the Western male role is related to negative psychological outcomes. An important study within this is the O’Neil 2008 summary of 25 years of research on men’s gender role conflict using the gender role conflict scale.

Corrigan, Elizabeth A. and Alison M. Konrad. 2007. Gender role attitudes and careers: A longitudinal study. *Sex Roles*, 56(11/12): 847-55.

This paper investigates the direction of the relationship between gender role attitudes and time spent on paid work and earnings. Separate analyses are performed for men and women to allow for gender differences.

Eagly, Alice H. and Steven J. Karau. 1991. Gender and the emergence of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(5): 685-710.

This article is a meta-analysis of the relationship between gender and the emergence of leaders. Most studies assessed are laboratory experiments. The researchers give an overview of gender role theory perspective and use this to explain the association between gender and leadership emergence.

Eagly, Alice H. and Steven J. Karau. 2002. Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3): 573-598.

In this article, Eagly and Karau set out their role congruity theory and review existing literature. It deals with the congruity between gender roles (women more communal, men more agentic) and leadership roles (for which more agentic qualities are assumed to be necessary).

Eccles, Jacquelynne S., Janis E. Jacobs, and Rena D. Harold. 1990. Gender role stereotypes, expectancy effects, and parents' socialization of gender differences. *Journal of Social Issues*, 46(2): 183-201.

This article systematically looks at explanations for the role parents play in the gender stereotypical participation in activities of their children. It contrasts three explanations and looks both at previous studies as well as analysing new data.

Fischer, Eileen and Stephen J. Arnold. 1994. Sex, gender identity, gender role attitudes, and consumer behaviour. *Psychology and Marketing*, 11(2): 163-182.

In this article, confusion in terminology between sex, gender identity, and gender role attitudes is discussed. It is also tested whether they are indeed different constructs.

Kaufman, Gayle. 2000. Do gender role attitudes matter? Family formation and dissolution among traditional and egalitarian men and women. *Journal of Family Issues*, 21(1): 128-144.

Gayle Kaufman looks at how gender role attitudes matter for family formation and dissolution five years later. It explicitly takes into account that the same attitudes may lead to different results for men and women.

O'Neil, James M. 2008. Summarizing 25 years of research on men's gender role conflict using the gender role conflict scale: New research paradigms and clinical implications. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 36(3): 358-445.

This article gives a concise summary of 232 empirical studies that used the Gender Role Conflict Scale between the years 1982 and 2007. It reviews the literature organized on several themes and gives advice for further research.

Spence, Janet T. 1993. Gender-related traits and gender ideology: Evidence for a multifactorial theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64(4): 624-635.

The main part of this article focuses on various questionnaires; the Bem Sex-Role Inventory, the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, and three sex role attitudes measures to see how these were related. Also discusses the relationship between gender roles and gender identity and argues for a multifactorial gender identity theory.

Van der Horst, Mariska. 2014. Gender role attitudes. In: Alex C. Michalos (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*, Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht.

This encyclopedia entry gives a short introduction to gender role attitudes, providing a definition as well as some background.

Role Change and Role Transitions

Roles do not remain the same over time. Think for example about different roles that children have compared to adults in Western countries. Benedict 1986 for example discussed continuity and discontinuity in conditioning children for various roles. Theorists differ in how they envision role change. Matilda White Riley 1971 takes a mostly functionalist approach, though stressing the importance of changes in how roles should be enacted. Hakim 2000 instead focuses on sex-role preferences, acknowledging that not everyone prefers to take on the same role. This latter theory is heavily criticized, mostly because it de-emphasized the impact of the context by for example Crompton & Lyonette 2005 and McRae 2003a, as well as because the adaptability of preferences is not acknowledged by for example Kan 2007. Ferree 1990 discusses how gender roles are constructed rather than 'just' enacted, herewith focusing on a different aspect of role change. Some studies take an explicit life course perspective. Super 1980, for example, directly links the roles to theatres and discusses how this changes over different life stages. With participating in multiple roles comes the problem of how to move from one role to another (referred to as *role transitions*).

Benedict, Ruth. 1986. *Continuities and discontinuities in cultural conditioning*. In: Alan Dundes. (Ed.) *Every man his way: Readings in cultural anthropology*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

This chapter is a reprint of a classic 1938 paper looking at continuity and discontinuity in cultural conditioning. It places specific attention to differences between various cultures.

Crompton, Rosemary and Clare Lyonette. 2005. The new gender essentialism – domestic and family 'choices' and their relation to attitudes. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 56(4): 601-620.

In this paper, Crompton and Lyonette look at both preference theory and populist conservative feminism. They argue that Hakim should take structural constraints into account more.

Ferree, Myra Marx. 1990. Beyond separate spheres: Feminism and family research. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 52(4): 866-884.

This seminal paper criticises role theory for not being able to take variation *within* roles into account as well as for ignoring the role of power and conflict. Taking a gender perspective, this paper focuses on the construction of maleness and femaleness. Clearly discusses this perspective against role theory.

Hakim, Catherine. 2000. *Work-lifestyle choices in the 21st century: Preference theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This book outlines preference theory. The theory inspired much research on the preferences of women (and to a lesser degree men). It is important for the role it played in focussing on women's careers and the role of preferences, but it is highly criticised.

Kan, Man Yee. 2007. Work orientations and wives' employment careers: An evaluation of Hakim's preference theory. *Work and Occupations*, 34(4): 430-462.

This paper empirically investigates some propositions of Hakim's preference theory. Takes a step away from the gender-role preferences versus constraints debate and argues that both are important.

McRae, Susan. 2003. Constraints and choices in mothers' employment careers: a consideration of Hakim's Preference Theory. *British Journal of Sociology*, 54(3): 317-338.

This paper tests on longitudinal data some of the premises of Hakim's Preference theory. Its main claim is that Preference Theory does not take the constraints women face enough into account.

Moreland, John. 1980. Age and change in the adult male sex role. *Sex Roles*, 6(6): 807-818.

This article reviews literature looking at stable and transitional states in the gender male role. This literature review points to several early sources on role transitions. Also interesting paper for how role norms change over time.

Super, Donald E. 1980. A life-span, life-space approach to career development. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 16(3): 282-298.

Super identifies nine major roles that are performed in individuals' lives that take place in four principal theatres. As he acknowledges himself, however, there are more roles an individual can play and more theatres where these roles can be performed. He discusses the combination of these roles, the change over time in roles, and how this relates to different life stages.

White Riley, Matilda. 1971. Social gerontology and the age stratification of society. *The Gerontologist*, 1(1 part 1): 79-87.

This article tries to set up a sociology of age stratification. It uses role theory at several places in the article. Talks about different roles depending on age as well as societal changes in how roles should be enacted.

Theories of Role Transitions

Various theories have been introduced on role transitions. Louis 1980, for example, makes a typology of role transitions and contrasts inter role transitions from intra role transitions. Where inter role transitions refers to changes in objective roles, intra role transitions refer to subjective reinterpretations of old roles. Nicholson 1984 theorises about work role transitions, looking at various modes of adjustment. The roles individuals perform keep changing throughout the life course, and socialisation for these roles therefore also does not stop after childhood. Mortimer and Simmons 1978 give an early review on adult socialisation. Van Maanen and Schein 1979 instead developed a theory of organisational socialisation.

Louis, Meryl Reis. 1980. Career transitions: Varieties and commonalities. *Academy of Management Review*, 5(3): 329-340.

This theoretical paper identifies various career transitions (where career explicitly refers to work and non-work roles) and looks at commonalities across the various transitions.

Mortimer, Jeylan T. and Simmons, Roberta G. 1978. Adult Socialization. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 4: 421-454.

This is an often-cited review article on the topic of adult socialization. Directly related socialization to role change, but also discusses the role of socialization in other theories.

Nicholson, Nigel. 1984. A theory of work role transitions. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 29(2): 172-191.

A highly cited article on work role transitions. Explicitly looks at prior socialisation and motivation, organisational socialisation, and role requirements as predictors of adjustments to new roles.

Van Maanen, John and Edgar H. Schein. 1979. Toward a theory of organizational socialization. In Barry M. Staw (eds). *Research in Organizational Behavior*, vol. 1: 209-264. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

A highly cited article on organizational socialization. Explicitly discusses the role of human agency within this framework and how individuals can bring about organisational change as well as how individuals adapt to roles within an organization. Describes six socialization processes.

Macro Role Transitions

Stephens 1994 looks at macro-transitions, the less frequent major transitions such as becoming a parent or being promoted, and makes a distinction between objective role transitions (such as retiring) and subjective role transitions (such as adapting to the role of retiree). Specific conceptual models, such as the one developed by Burr 1972, have been made about the ease of role transitions. Wang and Shultz 2010 use the transition into retirement to show how role theory relates to other theories explaining this transition. Ibarra and Barbulescu 2010 proposed a different theory on macro role transitions. They developed a process model of macro transitions based on both role theory and narrative theory.

Burr, Wesley R. 1972. Role transitions: A reformulation of theory. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 34(3): 407-416.

This article sets out a theory specific about the ease of role transitions. Drawing strongly on previous work, this article sets 19 propositions for further research to test. It acknowledges that it only looks at one aspect of role transitions (the ease with which a transition is made) and that there are other aspects research could look at.

Ibarra, Herminia and Barbulescu, Roxana. 2010. Identity as narrative: Prevalence, effectiveness, and consequences of narrative identity work in macro work role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(1): 135-154.

Ibarra and Barbulescu describe a theory of role transitions that focuses on how self-narratives (can) help individuals move from one role to another. Also discusses the dynamic nature of these narratives. Concentrates on work role transitions.

Stephens, Gregory K. 1994. Crossing internal career boundaries: The state of research on subjective career transitions. *Journal of Management*, 20(2): 479-501.

This article explains the distinction between objective and subjective career transitions, reviews literature on subjective career transitions as this is less commonly researched, and gives directions for further research. This discussion focuses on macro transitions rather than micro transitions.

Wang, Mo and Kenneth S. Shultz. Employee retirement: A review and recommendations for future investigation. *Journal of Management*, 36(1): 172-206.

This article reviews literature of the retirement transition. With regard to major role transitions, this article is of interest in how it positions role theory against other theories on this transition and different ways role theory can be used in explaining retirement. When reviewing the empirical evidence, they refer back to the theories as well.

Micro Role Transitions

Theories on micro-transitions typically look at borders between various roles that individuals occupy simultaneously. Nippert-Eng 1996 for example theorises on boundary work on the example of work

and family, comparing integrating versus segmenting strategies. Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate 2000 also theorized about micro-transitions and the role of integration versus segmentation. Theories on boundary work have also been tested empirically, for example by Fonner and Stache 2012 on how teleworkers manage work-home transitions. Shumate and Fulk 2004 instead developed the theory of Ashforth *et al.* further by adding a communication perspective while Piszczek and Berg 2014 further boundary theory by going beyond the individual-level focus that most applications take and include international regulative institutions. Many studies focus on a specific aspect. For example, Fritz *et al.* 2010 looked at detachment from the work role, while Rau and Hyland 2002 looked at the attractiveness of flexible working arrangements for people experiencing much work-family conflict. Winkel and Clayton 2010 investigated the theory by assessing role flexibility and role salience.

Ashforth, Blake E., Glen E. Kreiner, and Mel Fugate. 2000. All in a day's work: Boundaries and micro role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(3): 472-491.

An often-cited article on frequent role transitions. The article describes a continuum between segmented and integrated roles. Segmented roles have clear boundaries that are less easy to combine but do not suffer from blurring of roles while integrated roles are easy to combine but run the risk of role-blurring.

Fonner, Kathryn L. and Lara C. Stache. 2012. All in a day's work, at home: teleworkers' management of micro role transitions and the work-home boundary. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 27(3): 242-257.

This article empirically looks at some of the Boundary Theory as proposed by Ashforth *et al.* (also referred to in this section). It uses grounded theory to look at how teleworkers deal with work-home role transitions.

Fritz, Charlotte, Maya Yankelevich, Anna Zarubin, and Patricia Barger. 2010. Happy, healthy, and productive: The role of detachment from work during nonwork time. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(5): 977-983.

This paper also investigates integration versus segmentation of work versus non-work roles. It focuses on a more psychological aspect of role transitions, namely psychological detachment from the work role, and investigates how this relates to well-being and job performance.

Nippert-Eng, Christena. 1996. Calendars and keys: The classification of "home" and "work". *Sociological Forum*, 11(3): 563-582.

This paper reports on a qualitative study investigating boundary work. The paper theorises on boundary work and presents empirical findings. Looks at examples of calendars and keys to investigate how individuals integrate or segregate between home and work. Though less specifically related to role theory, it is in many ways similar to Ashforth *et al.* 2000 on how roles are combined or segregated.

Piszczek, Matthew M. and Peter Berg. 2014. Expanding the boundaries of boundary theory: Regulative institutions and work-family role management. *Human Relations*, 67(12): 1491-1512

This article criticises previous research that look at the boundary between work and family on being too focussed on the individual level. It furthers Boundary Theory by explicitly adding international regulative institutions and theorises how this affects the existing theory and discusses existing bodies of literature could benefit from their additions to the theory.

Rau, Barbara L. and Mary Anne M. Hyland. 2002. Role conflict and flexible work arrangements: The effects on applicant attraction. *Personnel Psychology*, 55(1): 111-136.

This empirical article looks at the association between experienced role conflict and attractiveness of flexible working arrangements. It distinguishes work-to-family conflict, family-to-work conflict, and work-to-school conflict.

Shumate, Michelle and Janet Fulk. 2004. Boundaries and role conflict when work and family are collocated: A communication network and symbolic interaction approach. *Human Relations*, 57(1): 55-74.

This article theorises how micro role transitions are related to role conflict of homeworkers and discusses ways to reduce role conflict. Reviews existing literature on this and adds a communication perspective.

Winkel, Doan E. and Russell W. Clayton 2010. Transitioning between work and family roles as a function of boundary flexibility and role salience. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 76(2): 336-434.

This paper empirically tests whether the degree to which an individual is willing and able to flex their work or family role boundaries is related to work-to-family or family-to-work transitions. They also investigate the impact of role salience in this relationship.

International Relations

Many applications of role theory focus on the individual level, but a specific subfield in role theory applies the theory to International Relations and, thus, explicitly takes a broader focus. It concentrates on international relationships and foreign policy and looks not only at individuals, but also for example at the roles different states have internationally. A recent study of Wehner and Thies 2014 looks at how role theory could meaningfully be used to look at international relations. Holsti 1970 is mentioned as the originator of this application of role theory. Harnisch, Frank and Maull 2011 give a fairly recent update on the current state of the field. Some of the criticisms on the use of role theory on the topic of international relations mirror the ones in broader role theory, such as the discussion about agency versus structure (see *Beyond Interactionism versus Structuralism*). There are, however, also some criticisms that are more specific for this application of role theory. For example, Cantir & Kaarbo 2012 and Wehner & Thies 2014 question the consensus on the national level that is often assumed when looking at international relations.

Cantir, Cristian and Juliet Kaarbo. 2012. Contested roles and domestic politics: Reflections on role theory in foreign policy analysis and IR theory. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 8(1): 5-24.

This article problematizes the often held assumption in role theory that roles are shared across both elites and masses as well as between elites. It suggests integration between role theory, foreign policy analysis and international relations theory.

Harnisch, Sebastian, Cornelia Frank, and Hanns W. Maull (eds). 2011. *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*. London: Routledge.

This book gives an overview of the use of role theory on the topic of International Relations. In the 14 chapters after the introduction, this book describes the theories, the roles and institutions, and the US hegemony.

Holsti, Kalevi J. 1970. National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy. *International Studies Quarterly*, 14(3): 233-309.

This seminal article applies role theory to the analysis of foreign policies. In order to make this work, role theory needs to be somewhat adapted, which is explicitly discussed in this paper. It also applies the proposed framework/procedure.

Wehner, Leslie E. and Cameron G. Thies. 2014. Role theory, narratives, and interpretation: The domestic contestation of roles. *International Studies Review*, 16(3): 411-436.

This article criticizes some of the previous usages of role theory with respect to international relations and suggests merging role theory with the interpretive approach to overcome these limitations.

Other Applications

A couple of often-researched topics have been discussed, but role theory has been applied much more broadly than this. Taking the example of gender role theory, it has also been used to look at the relationship between field of study and wage levels by Ochsenfeld 2014, at expectations of pain by Robinson *et al.* 2001, at attitudes toward homosexuality by Whitley Jr. 2001, at Christmas gift shopping by Fischer & Arnold 1990, and at risk for eating disorders by Cantrell & Ellis 1991. Gender roles are thought to be largely taught through gender socialization. This is being investigated as well, for example by looking at gender portrayal in popular video games by Dietz 1998. Next to individual level gender roles, gender roles have also been assessed at the macro-level, then often referred to as gender culture. Gender culture has been linked to several outcomes, including experienced work-family combination pressure by Van der Lippe, Jager, & Kops 2006, and individual-level support for traditional gender roles and women's employment by Lück 2006.

Cantrell, Peggy J. and Jon B. Ellis. 1991. Gender role and risk patterns for eating disorders in men and women. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 47(1): 53-57.

Paper looks at the relationship between gender and eating disorder from a gender role perspective by testing the role of femininity and masculinity (also including undifferentiated and androgynous).

Dietz, Tracy L. 1998. An examination of violence and gender role portrayals in video games: Implications for gender socialization and aggressive behavior. *Sex Roles*, 38(5/6): 425-441.

This paper explicitly relates gender portrayals in popular video games to gender role socialization. Although it does not test the relationship between gender portrayal and the impact it has on children, it does explicitly discuss how this could work and how this has implications for gender roles.

Fischer, Eileen, and Stephen J. Arnold. 1990. More than a labor of love: Gender roles and Christmas gift shopping. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17(3): 333-345.

This article assesses the impact of gender roles on Christmas gift shopping. It looks both at gender role attitudes and gender identity.

Lück, Detlev. 2006. The impact of gender role attitudes on women's life courses. In Hans-Peter Blossfeld and Heather Hofmeister (eds). *Globalization, uncertainty and women's careers: An international comparison*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

This chapter looks at how both individual and societal gender role attitudes impact women's life courses. It also looks at how societal gender role attitudes are related to individual gender role attitudes.

Ochsenfeld, Fabian. 2014. Why do women's fields of study pay less? A test of devaluation, human capital, and gender role theory. *European Sociological Review*, 30(4): 536-548.

This paper compares devaluation theory, human capital theory, and gender role theory to study why it is the case that fields of study that are popular among women pay less. Of these three theories, gender role theory is the most likely theory to explain found relationships.

Robinson, Michael E., Joseph L. Riley III, Cynthia D. Myers, Rebecca K. Papas, Emily A. Wise, Lori B. Waxenberg, and Roger B. Fillingim. 2001. Gender role expectations of pain: Relationship to sex differences in pain. *The Journal of Pain*, 2(5): 251-257.

This paper describes a newly developed questionnaire, namely the Gender Role Expectations of Pain questionnaire (GREP). It makes a distinction between feeling pain and reporting pain and discusses how this may differ due to gender role expectations.

Van der Lippe, Tanja, Annet Jager, and Yvonne Kops. 2006. Combination pressure: The paid work-family balance of men and women in European countries. *Acta Sociologica*, 49(3): 303-319.

This article looks at country differences in experienced combination pressure. It uses gender culture as a possible explanation for found country differences.

Whitley Jr., Bernard E. 2001. Gender-role variables and attitudes toward homosexuality. *Sex Roles*, 45(11/12): 691-721.

This article consists of two studies. The first is a meta-analysis of the relationship between gender-role variables and attitudes toward homosexuality; the second is the authors' own empirical analysis based on the findings of the meta-analysis.