

Structural Determinants of Student Behavior on Tanna, Vanuatu

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ABSTRACT Following Merton's theoretical orientation on roles, a study was conducted to examine the modes of adaptive behavior of students in schools in a non-Western culture. Questionnaires were used to explore the factors operating within the role set and how they influenced behavioral modes of students. The research was conducted on Tanna, Vanuatu, a setting in which cults and social opposition to government and other authorities was frequent. The concepts provided by Merton's theories were found to be useful in this cross-cultural environment. Although the research question was rejected on the basis of the questionnaire results, a valuable test of and two additions to Merton's concepts, specifically the addition of role set members and a continuum for modes of adaptation, resulted.

INTRODUCTION

This study, under the aegis of Merton's theoretical orientation, concerns observations of the modes of adaptive behaviors used within schools of a particular culture. Merton's role theory, including social structure, anomie, and other related topics, is briefly reviewed. Merton's ideas were operationalized and a questionnaire-based survey was conducted on Tanna, Vanuatu, an island in the Southwest Pacific. The intent was to determine if factors operating within the role set influenced behavioral modes of students in schools on Tanna.

ROLES AND ROLE THEORY

This review of role theory gives emphasis to Merton's (1938, 1957, 1968) theoretical explanations of roles, the role set, social structure, anomie, and adaptive behaviors used by role incumbents. A theoretical model of the manner in which role expectations are sent to the focal person and the different types of role conflicts that result, was described by Katz and Kahn (1978). The signal work of Gross, Mason, and MacEachern (1958) dispels the idea of consensus among role definers. Marwell and

Hage's (1970) factor-analysis study examines structural pressures that influence different role relationships. Biddle and Thomas (1966) provide a comprehensive overview of the concepts and research in role theory.

The initial impetus to develop role theory came from theorists who recognized social forces acting on individuals and developed sociological levels of explanation. Durkheim (1933), for example, claimed that social facts are ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, exterior to the individual and endowed with the power of coercion. This theory about social facts was tested in his early work on suicide. He found that causes of suicide were external and were effective only if the individual ventured into their sphere of activity.

Precursory contributors, such as Durkheim in the early 1900's, were followed by development of a more systematic body of knowledge of role theory in the 1930's. Three major contributors are credited with this new field of study. Linton's (1936) *The Study of Man* developed and defined the terms of role and status. Authors more recently, including Merton, still use these terms as initially described by Linton. Moreno (1932) contributed ideas about the development of role taking in psychodrama and the use of the sociogram. George H. Mead (1934) provided the concept of the "generalized other," which has been important in much thinking on the study of roles. More recently, Merton has emerged as one of the central theorists on roles and role sets. The following discussion depends upon some of his most important work, and describes how his theory is applied in this study.

Many definitions of the term "role" are found in the literature. Gross, Mason, and MacEachern (1958) devote an entire chapter to definitional problems and examine the definitions used by Linton, and various other authors. They argue that role as a concept is generally used to include the normative element of social behavior. For

the purposes of their study, expectation was defined as an evaluative standard applied to the incumbent of a role. Role was then defined as a set of expectations. Merton (1968) used Linton's (1936) original concepts of a social status, which refer to a position in a social system with designated rights and obligations. The concept of role then, refers to the behavior of the incumbent of a position that is oriented to the patterned expectation of others.

Several ideas are crucial to the understanding of the concept of role. First, each role has an array of surrounding roles, i.e., there are a number of others associated with any role, and these set the expectations for the individual occupying a given role. This array of roles is called the role set (Merton, 1957). It involves social arrangements that integrate the expectations of those in the role set to the role incumbent. Expectations held by one member to some extent affect all other structurally related members. This arrangement binds the role incumbent structurally to a larger social system.

Role, then, is the point of interaction between the individual and the system. Second, the patterned expectation of others associated with a role must be acted out behaviorally by the role incumbent. It is the enactment of these expectations that merge the individual with the role. Merton describes social mechanisms that operate within the role set which articulate the expectations of its members to the role incumbent. These social mechanisms of the role set (SMORS) provide order and include:

1. Status - the relative importance of various statuses,
2. Power - the differences of power held by those in the role set,
3. Insulation - the extent to which role activities are observable by members of the role set,
4. Conflict observability - the extent to which conflicting demands on the role incumbent by members of the role set are observable,
5. Status-occupant support - the term, "role," implies that a particular role can be occupied by a number of individuals. This mechanism looks at the degree of mutual social support among these status occupants, and
6. Abridgement - the loss of a role from the role set.

The larger cultural structure organizes certain normative values, which govern the ways an

individual should behave. These normative values are transmitted to the individual through a system of social relationships -the role set. Role-set members are responsible for enforcing the duties and responsibilities expected of a particular role. To the degree that the persons in the role set are from various social classes, they will bring varying and differing values, beliefs, and expectations. To the degree that the individual is from a strata different from the ones that make up the cultural norms, he will bring differing values, beliefs, and perceptions to his role. Conflict arises when there is a discrepancy between goals and the socially structured means to achieve and maintain these goals. The individual adapts in various ways to these conflicts. Social and cultural factors are used to explain behavior.

The imbalance between goals and means can become a source of anomie or social disorganization in terms of the larger norms of the society. A summary of Merton's theory of anomie (Cohen, 1966) notes that Merton makes "explicit" that which was "implicit" in Durkheim's analysis of suicide.

There are three aspects of structure, two concern the culture structure and, one, the social structure. Goals, one aspect of culture structure, are the wants and aspirations of the people in the culture. Norms, the second aspects of the culture, prescribe the legitimate means that may be used to achieve the cultural goals. The third, means, is an aspect of the social structure. Means are the facilities and opportunities available, which may be used in accordance with the norms to achieve the cultural goal. It is the relationship among and between these three structural factors that can create a disjunction, which leads to a sense of strain; i.e., frustration, despair, injustice, and anomie. It is this disjunction that can pressure people into non-conforming behavior.

In the social order described above, five modes of behavioral adaptations (MOA) are possible. They are conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion (Chart 1). These adaptations refer not to the personality of the individual but to role adjustments or role performance in specific socially structured situations. Adaptations are to a role as a whole; one adapts to a role rather than to certain norms or expectations. Socialization, then, focuses on the relationship as a unit rather than on conformity to a single norm (Goode, 1966).

Chart 1: Merton's (1938) modes of adaptation (moa)

Type	Adaptation	Cultural Goals	Institutionalized Means
I	Conformity	+	+
II	Innovation	+	-
III	Ritualism	-	+
IV	Retreatism	-	-
V	Rebellion	+ -	+ -

(+) acceptance; (-) elimination; (+,-) substitution of new.

An important aspect of role theory is to account for the conformity to and the variance from the expected role prescriptions. A useful theory should provide ways to examine the variability of behaviors exhibited by incumbents of the same role. Conflicting expectations may affect the role incumbent's behaviors and adaptations. Merton (1938) does not deny the contribution of biological or personality differences to the incidence of deviant conduct; rather he provides a different emphasis by focusing on the social and cultural matrix to explain behavior.

Of interest in this paper is the application of Merton's notions of role set theory to the role of student, more particularly the possible influence of the SMORS on the behavior modes of adaptations of students. In the case of a student, the role set would include the expectations held by teachers, parents, and others with whom the student is structurally related. It is hypothesized that the social mechanisms operating within the role set influence students to adapt to their role in various modes.

PROCEDURES

This study concerned the structural origins of variance in the modes used by individuals to adapt to the role of student. It was proposed that the variance of the student's modes of adaptation could be accounted for through the social mechanisms at work within the role-set. These would affect the individual's ability to learn and accept the norms and therefore the role of student. The research question asked if there is a relationship between the SMORS, which serve to communicate the norms and role expectations to the students, and the student's resultant mode of adaptation to the role.

Questionnaires and forms were developed to collect data to assess the social mechanisms of the role set and determine the mode of adaptations used by a student. These

questionnaires were designed to be given to students and to their identified role-set members. Role-set members were those people filling positions structurally related to the students who define, control, and/or influence their role behavior. Determination of role-set members for this study was made through interviews with school personnel and various village people. Teacher perceptions were felt to be the most valid for determining students MOA.

The questionnaires and forms developed operationalized the following:

1) norms - the rules which define what students should or should not do.

2) the SMORS - the mechanisms of status; power; insulation; conflict observability; status-occupant support; and abridgement, which articulate the expectations of the role-set members,

3) teacher's perceptions of the MOA including conformity, ritualism, innovation, retreatism, and rebellion, used by students,

4) perceptions of the student with regard to acceptance or non-acceptance of his or her role; future expectations; types of power used by role-set members and status-occupant support; that is, the student is not alone in the role; others similarly share his or her fate.

Merton's ideas regarding the relationship of cultural goals and institutionalized means to Modes of Adaptation (Chart 1) were modified. Student's role expectations were seen as analogous to cultural goals and the social mechanisms of the role set as analogous to institutionalized means (Chart 2). The following is a description of how it was proposed that the SMORS would effect the MOA. When the socially structured means (SMORS) function inefficiently, the role expectations do not get presented to the student structured well enough for him to adequately perceive them. Therefore, socialization of the individual into the student role is incomplete.

Chart 2: Modes of adaption related to student expectations and social mechanisms of the role set

MOA	Student Role Expectations (Cultural Goals)	Social Mechanisms of the Role-Set Members (SMORS) (Institutionalized Means)
Retreatism	-	-
Ritualism	-	+
Conformity	+	+
Innovation	+	-
Rebellion	+ -	+ -

For role expectations, a plus (+) indicates acceptance, and a minus (-) indicates rejection. For social mechanisms, a plus (+) indicates effectiveness, and a minus (-) indicates ineffectiveness.

The first adaptation - retreatism - occurs when an individual does not receive and does not accept "student" expectations. Perhaps she has attempted the "student role," but has met with repeated failure and so has given up. Though legally a "student," she has been exempted by the larger system. In the United States, this adaptation includes a whole range of children often labelled as suitable for "special-education classes." Again, it should be stressed that we are not discussing personality adjustments but adaptation to the particular role, "students."

The social mechanisms may be working effectively, but the student could reject the expectations. The mechanisms work to the extent that she goes through the motions, but she is not committed. This adaptation - ritualism - usually occurs when the expectations seem beyond the individual's reach.

When the social mechanisms work effectively, the student can accept or reject the expectations sent. If the social mechanisms work, and if the student accepts the sent expectations and acts in accordance with them, her adaptation can be described as conformity. This adaptation is the most common. The conformist accepts the basic group norms and provides stability and continuity to the role.

A fourth adaptation also occurs when the social mechanisms are not functioning effectively. If the role incumbent is able to perceive and accept the larger social norms for the "student" role through secondary means, she or he probably will behave marginally as a student. However, she may engage in illegitimate activities to maintain her status. For example, she may cheat, get others to do her work, and so on. She receives only a partial or fragmented idea of what a "student" is, so performs the role according to this unorganized perception. She does not have the opportunity to learn to act the way a student is supposed to act, so she invents her own ways to "act" like a "student."

Rebellion - the fifth adaptation - is described as being on a plane definitely different from the others. It represents a transitional response seeking to institutionalize new goals and new procedures (Merton, 1968). For most "students" within our public schools, this is not a viable adaptation. The "students" at most, would form

a small, united group, powerless in terms of the larger system. Conditions necessary for this adaptation are not generally permitted within the confines of schools.

These five MOA form the range of adaptations given the degree of effectiveness of the SMORS and the student's acceptance of the expectations of the role. A change was made in the order of the MOA from Merton's original which started with conformity through to rebellion. The reasoning for this change is explained in the discussion.

Some six processes function within the SMORS and affect the abilities of individuals to take roles (Merton, 1957). Methods were designed to operationalize these six processes. Following is an explanation of these variables and their possible contribution to the role assuming process.

1. Status

The role set members are a matter of social organization and are determined by the social structure associated with a particular role. Each of these members has varying degrees of importance. Persons occupying similar polar social positions tend to behave in similar ways and share common values and beliefs. Those from differing social statuses will not share values, beliefs, and so on, and so will have different ideas about appropriate conduct.

Linton's thirteen classes were used to gather information and rank status and role. The original classification included the following ascribed (1-4) and achieved (5-13) status roles based on particular characteristics:

1. Sex - sexual characteristics, i.e., male, female.
2. Age - chronological maturity, i.e., infant, child, and so on.
3. Race - racial background, i.e., Negroid, Caucasoid.
4. Kinship - kinship relations, i.e., mother, daughter.
5. Residence - where one resides.
6. Economic - distribution of wealth, income, land, and so on.
7. Political - type and level of participation in government.
8. Ritual - practice of set forms or rites of public worship.
9. Proprietary - special learning, knowledge, and/or skill.
10. Expressive - demonstrated abilities in the areas of communication, creativity, and so

- on, i.e., artists, dancers, orators.
- 11. Service - occupation, i.e., teacher, labourer.
- 12. Recreational - social relationship of equality, i.e., member - member, partner, peer.
- 13. Asymmetric relations - social relationships of inequality, i.e., leader - follower, chairman - member.

2. Power

Questions were designed to examine the role set members' dimensions of power. It was the distribution of power and authority relative to members' capability to shape student behavior that was assessed. The centrality of a role set member's concern with students was also a variable of power. A powerful member who has no direct concern with student behavior is not as likely to exercise power. A less powerful member centrally concerned with student behavior may exert all the power he has to shape the student's behavior. The student would feel a greater impact in the latter situation. A monopoly of power can outweigh the combined power of others. There can be a balance of power or power can be neutralized to allow the role incumbent to do what he wants.

From these questions: 1) the structure and distribution of the power in the role set was determined, and 2) the relationship of types of power bases to the particular role set members as perceived by students was assessed.

3. Insulation

Insulation is the social structuring of arrangements for observability of role performances. Students can not engage in continuous interactions with every member of their role set. Some insulation is needed to relieve them from competing demands of role set members.

Merton (1957) discusses three levels of observation for this factor. An optimal level is possible when privileged information or restrictions allow the role incumbent some privacy. This level affords the individual autonomy, yet assures accountability for the role. A second level occurs when there is too much observability, and consequently too little insulation. Privacy is a condition necessary both for the adequate functioning of the individuals in that social structure. Third, too little observability and too much insulation lead to lack of social control. In this case, even minimum

standards are difficult to enforce.

4. Conflict Observability

A measure of conflict observability is the occurrence of incompatible demands being made on the students. The awareness among role set members of these conflicts is relevant. If role set members are not aware that demands being made on the students are incongruent, they might think the student is wilfully flaunting their demands. This mechanism helps articulate the expectations for the role incumbents through the resolution of these conflicts regarding expectations. It should be the responsibility of the role set members to resolve the conflict. It is the role set members' conflict, not the students' conflict. Conflict is measured by the extent to which there are differences in demands made by various members.

5. Status Occupant Support

The "student" is not alone in his role; others share the same regularities, and expectations. It is this fact that encourages a structural coping response. This response is to organize support and conduct from peers. What do other status occupants consider as realistic expectations for their conduct? A determination was made as to whether the student accepted or rejected her role as student based on answers to various questions.

6. Abridgement of the Role Set

Two possible conditions can exist with this mechanism. One, a role set member may sever her role relationship. This condition would leave greater consensus of the remaining role set members, this seldom occurs. Role set members are members by reason of the social organization, not personal choice. Merton in Biddle and Thomas (1966: 287) stated "the option is apt to be that of the status occupant removing himself from the status rather than that of removing the role set ... Typically, the individual goes, and the social structure remains." Determination as to whether or not abridgement occurred was ascertained through interviews and observation techniques.

RESULTS

Various data reported students' acceptance/

non-acceptance of role, the types of power used by certain role-set members, and norms, as perceived by teachers and students. This data supplemented and complemented the main issue of the research, which investigated the influence of structural factors on students' MOA in two schools on Tanna. Tanna, an island in Vanuatu in the South Pacific, was chosen because of its availability to the research, and because of its well-described cargo cult of opposition to the government (Guiart, 1967). Data collected from teachers in schools included information concerning the SMORS and role-adaptation ratings of students. Using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, no significant difference was found in the SMORS of two schools, but a significant difference was found between the MOA in two schools (Chart 3). Therefore, statistically, no relationship between the SMORS and students' MOA could be determined.

This finding, however, should be noted with reservation. Of primary concern is the lack of a pilot done on the questionnaires prior to use in a cross-cultural setting. Further, this finding must be viewed in light of the particular circumstances that existed on Tanna.

Ethnographic data obtained through participant observation during the course of this study proved invaluable in gaining a broader perspective. It became evident that larger cultural facts existed which would influence the results. The ethnographic data revealed that there were three distinct sub-cultures on Tanna which at that time co-existed autonomously (Gregory and Gregory, 1984). One group (conformists)

supported the government, while a second group (retreatists) rejected anything "Western" and sought to retain their own "customs." A third group (rebels) which had rejected the government and mission and had lost their original customs formed a cult of opposition. Each group socialized their children differently. Only the conformists used schools as a means of socialization.

It also became evident that in this particular culture the SMORS did not have the impact that they might in a Western cultural setting. For instance, there were only small relative differences in socio-economic status of the people. The three factors that evidenced potential for differences relating to the MOA again were not as relevant in this culture. Insulation differed as many of the parents, as role set members, were insulated from the schools by a number of factors. One was they had not attended schools themselves and did not speak English. Many of the teachers were from different islands and so communication to the parents was conducted primarily through the children. This in turn, influenced conflict observability and power. Both were exercised in a way that would have effected the study results. Schools were not compulsory and so if the parents did not like what was going on at the school, they would just remove the child. This is in effect what had happened on Tanna. Those who did not like the policy of the government and missions did not send their children to the schools. As noted above, we found the children at the schools were drawn from a very narrow

Chart 3: Calculations for the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for differences in the modes of adaptation of two schools

<i>Modes of Adaptation</i>	<i>Lenakel Number</i>	<i>Cumulative Number</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>	
Conformity	115	115	.68	
Innovation	40	155	.92	
Ritualism	9	164	.97	
Retreatism	5	169	1.00	
Rebellion	0	169	1.00	

<i>Modes of Adaptation</i>	<i>Lenakel Number</i>	<i>Cumulative Number</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>	<i>Difference Scores</i>
Conformity	64	64	.48	.20
Innovation	30	94	.71	.21
Ritualism	27	121	.91	.06
Retreatism	7	128	.96	.04
Rebellion	5	133	1.00	.00

$$K - S @ .01 = 1.63 \frac{N + N}{N(N)} \frac{169 + 133}{169(133)} = .19$$

segment of the population.

In the context of ethnographic data, then, the statistical findings were expected. Teachers and students were all from the conformist group. Differences in SMORS would not be likely to exist with such a biased, restricted sample. Differences found in the MOA were minor differences between ritualism, innovation, and conformity and not rebellion or retreatism. From this investigation it would appear that ritualism and innovation are only variations of conformity.

The initial thought (or hypothesis) had been that because there was a cargo cult on the island that was in opposition to the government, there would be a high rate of rebellion in the schools. However, it turned out the rebellion was not with the students but was among the parents who rebelled by removing their children from the schools. The children who were in the schools were the ones whose parents supported the status quo.

DISCUSSION

Merton's theoretical notions contributed significantly to this research study. Overall, his modes of adaptation proved to be a valuable tool when applied on the level of a cultural analysis. His model of the modes provided an understanding of the relationship of education to culture that would have otherwise been impossible. The application of the MOA to cross-cultural situations makes them a potentially powerful tool.

The application of the MOA to a specific role - that of student - also brought particularly interesting results. Graphical representations of the data were of value in identifying particular patterns of adaptations used within schools and within individual classrooms.

Some modifications of the ways in which the MOA are conceptualized were noted during the course of the study (see difference in order of MOA in Chart 1 and Chart 2). Merton conceptualizes and lists the MOA, with conformity first, followed by innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and then rebellion. He views all adaptations, except conformity, as deviant. A continuum of the adaptations best served the purposes of this study. The revised continuum has retreatism and rebellion on either end, and ritualism, conformity, innovation are the middle or more moderate modes. When the MOA are seen on this continuum, it is easier to note that retreatism and rebellion are the more extreme

adaptations. The adaptations - ritualism and innovation - are seen as variations of the conformity mode. They fall on either side of conformity and are seen as being within acceptable ranges. As modes of adaptation, they would be allowed to remain "in" the system. The adaptations of retreatism and rebellion would not in any significant number be permitted to remain "in" the system. Therefore, in order to get an overall picture of the MOA and to see the more extreme modes that have been excluded or not included, either by themselves or others, one must look outside the system, as was the case on Tanna.

The analysis of retreatism within this study also differs with Merton's (1968: 153). He described the retreatist mode as including those who have been socialized into the predominant culture and who then reject it. On Tanna those who chose retreatism as a MOA had not been socialized into the more predominant Western culture, the mission and the government, but had retained the goals, means, values, and norms of their own culture. The people who actively rebelled were the ones who had left their own culture, had been socialized into the church and then turned against that social order to establish their own new goals and means through the John Frum Cargo cult. One aspect of the SMORS needs to be highlighted and that concerns the addition of role-set members. In the SMORS, Merton handles abridgement or the loss of a role-set member and its effect on the dynamics of the social mechanisms. He does not account for the effect of adding role-set members. This also occurs and can potentially affect the SMORS. Organizational manipulation and addition of role-set members can be a powerful means of effecting change.

CONCLUSION

The research question sought to determine a relationship between the SMORS and student MOA. Questionnaires were developed to collect data relevant to this question. These questionnaires were designed to gather information concerning the social mechanisms of the role set - specifically, the factors of status, power, insulation, and conflict observability. Information regarding abridgement of the role-set members was determined through interviews with the District Education Officer and the teachers. Status-occupant support, which is also considered a social mechanism, concerns the role

incumbent - in this case, the student. A questionnaire was developed to gather data on students' acceptance of the role and other aspects of status-occupant support.

Definitions of MOA were operationalized, and ratings from twelve teachers on 325 students in three schools were collected. Additional information was collected from eleven teachers throughout the Southern District on the rules or norms of the schools. Some 77 parents returned questionnaires, which concerned occupational expectations for their children and various factors associated with the SMORS.

There was sufficient data to test for differences in the factors of the SMORS and the student MOA between two of the schools. Only the factors of power, insulation, and conflict observability were used to determine differences in the SMORS. Difference in status rankings of role-set members did not differ for the two schools. Further, it was determined through interviews that no abridgement of role-set members had occurred. If abridgement had occurred, it could affect the dynamics of the social mechanisms and would, therefore, need to be considered.

Using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) Test, there was a significant difference at the .01 level between the student MOA in the two schools (Chart 3). However, no significant difference at the .05 level was found to exist between the schools regarding any of the SMORS factors, including power, insulation, or conflict observability. Statistically, the research question that assumed a relationship between the SMORS and the MOA was rejected.

Caution should be exercised regarding the lack of existence of support for the expected influence of the SMORS on the student MOA. A limitation of the study was the relatively unstandardized methods (the questionnaires) available to examine the research question. The questionnaires developed for the study may not have been sufficiently refined and no pilot was done prior to their use in a cross-cultural setting. The questions may not have been as specific or as direct as they should have been in relationship with the factors of the social mechanisms and role expectations. The lack of support for the predicted relationship may be the result of the lack of sensitivity of the instruments used. These findings, too, must be viewed in light of the particular circumstances that existed on Tanna.

These circumstances were a tri-furcation of the Tannese culture. In early times the govern-

ment and missions had imposed a uni-modal pattern of absolute conformity to their policies. During these times there was a high rate of deviance and a cult was formed. At the time of this study, the government allowed and accepted a tri-modal adaptation. The retreatists, who sought to return to custom, the conformists, who supported the government, and the rebels, who had formed the cult of opposition, existed autonomously. Each group socialized their children differently. It was primarily the conformists who used the schools as a means of socialization. Deviance was minimal.

For Durkheim (1956) a society cannot have a system of education other than that implied in its structure. This statement holds much truth for this study. Another truth implied in the results of this study is that there is a need to match not only method and problem, but also context.

NOTE

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