

role strain.” But what if her exhaustion results not from the time demands of simultaneously correcting her midterms and preparing for an upcoming research conference, but rather from the turmoil that ensued last night when the family dog destroyed her daughter’s biology project and she had to stay up all night helping her daughter redo it? In this case, **role conflict** is the culprit. It is not the roles within her status as professor that are the root of her problems, but rather the tensions between her role as professor and her role as mother. Whereas *role strain* refers to conflicting demands within the same status, *role conflict* describes the tension caused by competing demands between two or more roles within different statuses. Each one of us, at any given time, enjoys numerous statuses. These statuses (and their corresponding roles) can and do change over time and between places. When you started college, how did your status change? The obvious answer is that you went from being either a high-school student or perhaps an unskilled worker to becoming a college student. If you graduated from high school and went straight to college, you traded in one status for another. If you still maintain a full- or part-time job, you have added another status. The term **status set** refers to all the statuses you have at any given time.

To obtain a better sense of how roles and statuses function, try the following experiment: Write down as many answers to the question, “Who am I?” as you can. Compare your answers with your classmates’. With remarkable similarity, the lists will include statuses such as brother, sister, daughter, boyfriend, student, lifeguard, babysitter, roommate, and so forth. This occurs because we know ourselves in our social roles, in the ways in which we relate to others. You most likely will have listed the key components of your status set.

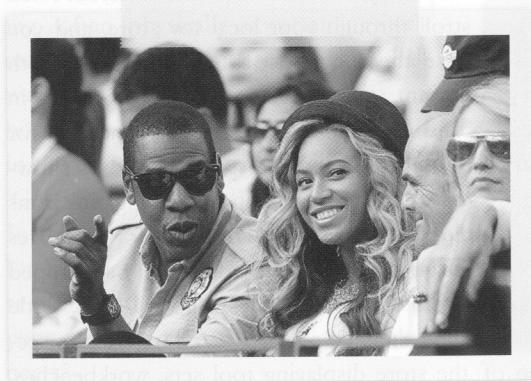
There are some other key terms that you must learn to understand role theory. Sociologists often make a distinction between an **ascribed status** and an **achieved status**, which basically amounts to what you are born with versus what you become. Another way to think about it is in terms of involuntary versus voluntary status. Your age, race, and sex are all largely *ascribed statuses*, whereas your status as a juggler, drug dealer, peace activist, or reality television

**Role conflict** the tension caused by competing demands between two or more roles pertaining to different statuses.

**Status set** all the statuses one holds simultaneously.

**Ascribed status** a status into which one is born; involuntary status.

**Achieved status** a status into which one enters; voluntary status.



Who are you? What are the different roles in your status set? For example, singer Beyonce’s statuses include mother, daughter, and partner.