

Marine Corps. For people to be effective soldiers, they must learn a new set of rules about when it is okay and/or necessary to kill (that is, when they are on active duty, not on leave and at the pizza parlor with their family).

Social Interaction

Status a recognizable social position that an individual occupies.

Role the duties and behaviors expected of someone who holds a particular status.

Role strain the incompatibility among roles corresponding to a single status.

To talk about how institutions and society as a whole socialize us, we need a language to describe social interaction. Robert Merton's role theory provides just such a vocabulary. The first key concept for an understanding of role theory is **status**, which refers to a recognizable social position that an individual occupies. The person who runs your class and is responsible for grading each student has the status of professor. **Roles**, then, refer to the duties and behaviors associated with a particular status. You can reasonably expect your professor to show up on time, clothed, and prepared for class. You can also expect that he or she has a fair amount of education, often a PhD, and is knowledgeable about the material. This may not always be true, but it is a fairly standard set of role expectations for someone with the status of professor. Roles are complicated, however, and relatively few of them materialize with handbooks and clear sets of expectations. Sometimes, we experience **role strain**, the incompatibility among roles corresponding to a single status. An example of this is the old dictum for university faculty, particularly young professors, to publish or perish. On the one hand, they need to stay on top of their research, write articles, give lectures, and attend conferences to stay abreast of current topics and remain active in the academic world. On the other hand, they have to teach and perform all the teaching roles that come with the status of professor—preparing lectures, running class sections, meeting with students, grading papers, and writing letters of recommendation.

When your professor arrives at class tomorrow morning with bags under her eyes and a look on her face that seems to say, "No amount of coffee will help me at this point," you may be tempted to conclude, "Oh, she's experiencing



role strain." But of simultaneous research confirms the family dog all night helping is not the role but rather the t Whereas *role strain* describes more roles with numerous status change over time status change? school student If you graduate one status for a added another s any given time.

To obtain a ing experiment: you can. Comparability, the lists w student, lifeguard know ourselves most likely will h

There are so theory. Sociolog an achieved statu what you become versus voluntary whereas your sta