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Understanding of personality and his structure

We often use words man, human being, person, individual, individuality, personality as identical in meaning. Actually, they denote different phenomena. Man is a most common, generic concept. Individual, person or human being identifies a definite person as a representative of mankind. Individuality is a set of qualities or characteristics distinguishing one person from another at the biological, psychological, social and other levels. Personality is introduced to focus on the human’s social nature. Social nature is of primary importance because when born, an infant is not personality. It is only an individual. To become personality, any individual must go through a development period wherein the obligatory terms are biological prerequisites and social milieu which a baby interact with. That’s why personality is understood as a social type of person which satisfies the demands of the society, its values and norms.

Structural analysis of personality is considered one of the most complex problems in sociology. Traditionally theorists differentiate between biological, psychological and social structures of personality studied by biology, psychology and sociology. A biological structure is taken into account by sociology when interactions between individuals are broken due to somebody’s illness or disorder because the disabled can’t perform all those social functions distinctive of healthy individuals. A psychological structure includes various emotions, feelings, memory, abilities etc. Although these qualities are of subjective character, they can be of interest for sociology as well because they can determine to some extent social behaviour of a person. As social quality is dominant in personality, a social structure of personality includes a set of his subjective and objective social qualities which are created and function in the process of his activity. As it comes from the definition, a distinction of the social structure of personality is his activity as itself and as interaction with other people.

Personality can also be defined as a certain type. The need to designate people according to character and personality is universal. Each historical era has formulated its own human types motivated by its perceptions and values, for instance, the hippie, the English country gentleman, the Sicilian Mafioso, the Arab sheik – these are but a few examples of the many cultural types. The urge to classify people by their character and temperaments has yielded well-known psychological types of choleric, sanguine, melancholic and phlegmatic people.

A Swiss psychiatrist Karl Jung (1875-1961) put forth the psychological theory (1923) that in normal behaviour the mind operates in two modes. He called these two modes as introversion and extroversion. People who prefer introversion tend to focus on their inner world of ideas and experiences. People who prefer extroversion tend to focus on the outer world and external events.

In sociology the focus is on social types. According to L. Wirth, “social type consists of a set of attitudes on the part of the person toward himself and the group and a corresponding set of attitudes of the group toward him, which together determine the role of the person in his social milieu. ”It suggests that a person can be recognized as a typical example of a familiar group or social category and remind of other individuals with similar values, behaviour, style and habits.

There are various classifications of personality types developed by M. Weber, K. Marx, E. Fromm, R. Darherndorf etc. For instance, asserting that personality is a product of cultural development and social environment R. Dahrendorf identified four types of personality on the basis of the term homo sociologicus:

* homo faber – a “working man”in traditional society: warrior, peasant, politician, or personality allotted with an important public function;
* homo consumer – a modern consumer, or personality moulded by mass society;
* homo universalis – a person with the aptitude to perform various activities;
* homo soveticus – a person depending on the state.

Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) worked out the conception of one-dimensional man (1964). Under the impact of propaganda a person perceives informational stereotypes and moulds simplified schemes of seeing phenomena as black-and-white. Modern society makes people as if they were one-dimensional humans perceiving the reality and existing processes in the context of primitive alternatives. In modern Russia such types are the new Russians, ordinary people, communists, oligarchs etc.

Another classification includes types of personality defined due to value orientations people follow:

* traditionalists are followed by values of duty, discipline, law; their level of self-realization, creativity is low;
* idealists are critical towards traditional norms and firmly determined to self-development;
* realists combine their strive for self-realization with a developed sense of duty;
* hedonistic materialists are oriented to satisfy their needs as consumers;
* frustrated personality is characterized by low self-assessment and depressive state.

As social structure of personality includes the person’s relations with the outer world and inner, ideal relations, sociologists also identify a basis and ideal type. The basis type most fully meets the demands of the society that’s why a basis personality means a set of typical qualities which are dominant in a given society. These qualities characterize the people who grew up in same culture, developed under same socialization processes, for instance, a workerholic in the Japanese society after World War II. The ideal type is a sort of standard or model declared by the society. It gives sociologists the right to assert that social types are produced by the society.

As we live in an era of rapid and dramatic changes when globalization is melting cultures down into a global one, in an era of social revolutions, mobs and wars we may spot in future new types of personality.

Theories of personality

A multi-dimensioned nature of person and diversity of his social relations determine a diversity of theoretic approaches to personality. One of them is the psychological analysis of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). He considered a person as a hedonist, as striving for getting satisfaction, with the society as a system of constraints and taboos. According to S. Freud, personality has three structures: the Id, the Ego, and the Superego. The Id consists of instincts, basically sexual. It is totally unconscious and has no contact with reality. As children experience the demands and constraints of reality, a new structure of personality emerges – the Ego. It is called the executive branch of personality because it uses reasoning to make decisions. The Id and the Ego have no morality. They do not take into account whether something is right or wrong. The highest structure is the Superego which is the moral branch of personality as it takes into account whether something is right or wrong that’s why it is seen as norms of the society. The Superego is what is often referred to as “conscience. ”The Id and the Superego are most aggressive branches. Attacking human psyche (the Ego) from both sides they make life rough for the Ego and give birth to a neurotic type of human behaviour. For instance, your Ego might say, “I will have sex only occasionally and be sure to take the proper precautions because I don’t want the intrusion of a child in the development of my career. ”However, your Id is saying, “I want to be satisfied; sex is pleasurable. ”Your Superego is at work, too: “I feel guilty about having sex before I’m married. ”Personality becomes neurotic as it is constantly defending from public pressure and conflicting with the social milieu. As soon as the society develops, the highest structure (the Superego) inevitably increases and becomes more massive and heavier, that’s why S. Freud considered the history of mankind as history of increasing psychosis.

Another approach is the role theory which has been fruitful to understanding humans and society.

In general, role theory includes the following propositions:

* people spend much of their lives participating as members of groups and organizations;
* within these groups people occupy distinct positions;
* each of these positions entails a role, which is a set of functions performed by the person for the group;
* groups often formalize role expectations as norms or even codified rules, which include what rewards will result when roles are successfully performed and what punishments will result when roles are not successfully performed;
* individuals usually carry out their roles and perform in accordance with dominating norms; in other words, role theory assumes that people are primarily conformists who try to live up to the norms that accompany their roles;
* group members check each individual’s performance to determine whether it conforms with the norms; the anticipation that others will apply sanctions ensures role performance.

So, role theory posits that human behaviour is guided by expectations held by the individual and other people. The expectations correspond to different roles individuals perform or enact in their daily lives, such as secretary, father or friend. For instance, most people hold pre-conceived notions of the role expectations of a secretary which might include answering phones, making and managing appointments, filing paperwork, typing memos etc. These role expectations can not be expected of a football player.

Individuals generally have and manage many roles. Roles consist of a set of rules or norms that function as plans to guide behaviour. Roles specify what goals should be pursued, what tasks must be accomplished, and what performances are required in a given situation. Role theory holds that a substantial proportion of observable, day-to-day social behaviour is simply persons’ carrying out their roles, much as actors carry out their roles on the stage. Role theory is, in fact, predictive. It implies that if we have information about the role expectations for a specified position (for instance, sister, fireman, doctor), a significant portion of the behaviour of the persons occupying that position can be predicted.

Moreover, role theory also argues that in order to change behaviour it is necessary to change roles; roles correspond to behaviours and vice versa. In addition to heavily influencing behaviour, roles influence beliefs and attitudes; individuals will change their beliefs and attitudes to correspond with their roles. For instance, someone over-looked for a promotion to a managerial position in a company may change their beliefs about the benefits of management by convincing him that they didn’t want the additional responsibility that would have accompanied the position.

Many role theorists see role theory as one of the most compelling theories bridging individual behaviour and social structure. Roles, which are in part dictated by social structure and in part by social interactions, guide the behaviour of the individual. The individual, in turn, influences the norms, expectations and behaviours associated with roles. If roles are considered as dictated by social structure, they are the subject for structural functionalism, if by social interactions – for interactionsist perspective.

The functionalist approach sees a role as a set of expectations that the society places on the individual. By unspoken consensus, certain behaviours are deemed appropriate and others – inappropriate. For example, it is appropriate for a doctor to dress conservatively, ask a series of personal questions about one’s health, touch one in ways that would normally be forbidden, write prescriptions, and show more concern for the personal well-being of his clients. Shopkeepers or real estate agents may also show concern for the well-being of their clients, but if they start touching their clients, especially where doctors are allowed to touch, they’ll get in trouble; they will have stepped outside of the norms associated with their roles.

In the functionalist conception, role is one of the important ways in which individual activities are socially regulated: roles create regular patterns of behaviour and thus a measure of predictability, which not only allows individuals to function effectively because they know what to expect of others, but also makes it possible for the sociologist to make generalizations about the society. Totally, a group of interlocking roles creates a social institution. For instance, the institution of law can be seen as the combination of many roles, including police officer, judge, criminal and victim.

In the functionalist perspective, roles are relatively inflexible and more or less universally agreed upon. Although it is recognized that different roles interact (teacher and student), and that roles are usually defined in relation to other roles (doctor and patient or mother and child), the functionalist approach has great difficulty in accounting for variability and flexibility of roles and finds it difficult to account for the vast differences in the way that individuals conceive different roles. Taken to extremes, structural functionalism results in role becoming a set of static, semi-global expectations laid down by a unified, amorphous society. The distinction between role and norm (or culture) thus becomes sterile.

The functionalist approach has been criticized for its static understanding of roles. Even so, it remains a fundamental concept which is still taught in most introductory courses and is still regarded as important.

In the interactionist perspective, the definition of role is more fluid and subtle than in the functionalist perspective. In this conception, a role is not fixed or prescribed but it is something that is constantly negotiated between individuals.

To explain the idea of roles, a famous American researcher G. Mead used a development model for children. According to him, children adopt roles in the development of self. In doing so, they pass through three stages:

* preparatory stage – meaningless imitation by the infant; the infant assumes roles but doesn’t understand what they are;
* play stage – actual playing of roles occurs; but the child has no unified conception of self;
* game stage – completion stage of self; the child finds himself and must respond to simultaneous roles; the individual can act with a certain amount of consistency in a variety of situations because he acts in accordance with a generalized set of expectations and definitions he has internalized.

No doubt, adults are beyond the game stage, but they continue to adopt roles and adapt them through interpersonal interactions. This can be most easily seen in encounters where there is considerable ambiguity. For instance, let’s assume John has a friend Nick who is a lawyer. If John approaches Nick as a friend but then asks for legal advice, it forces Nick either to switch roles completely or to merge the roles temporarily. Until Nick decides on his course of action, role ambiguity will exist.

There are also additional approaches to consider roles:

* structural approach – little attention is given to norms; attention is focused on social structures conceived as stable organizations of sets of persons (called social positions or statuses) who share the same, patterned behaviours (roles);
* organization – the approach focuses on social systems that are preplanned, task-oriented, and hierarchical; roles in such organizations are assumed to be associated with identified social positions and to be generated by normative expectations;
* cognitive role theory focuses on relationships between role expectations and behaviour.

Anyway, role theory has its limitations. It has a hard time explaining social deviance when it does not correspond to a pre-specified role. For instance, the behaviour of someone who adopts the role of a bank robber can be predicted – he will rob banks. But if a bank manager simply begins handing out cash to random people, role theory would be unable to explain why.

Another limitation of role theory is that it cannot explain how role expectations came to be what they are. Role theory has no explanation for why it is expected of male soldiers to cut their hair short, but it could predict with a high degree of accuracy that if someone is a male soldier they will have short hair. Additionally, role theory does not explain when and how role expectations change.

Despite these limitations, role theory describes adaptation of humans through their socialization into the basic values and norms of a given society.

Socialization of personality

The sociological view of socialization cannot be attributed to any single researcher but rather has been developed as a result of the work of many. Some of the more important researchers who have contributed to the filed are E. Durkheim, Ch. Cooley, G. Mead, J. Piaget and many others.

Socialization is a lifelong process by which, through contact with others, one becomes a self-aware, knowledgeable human being, skilled in the ways of a given culture and environment. Socialization suggests interiorizing of social roles and cultural norms. The focus is on interiorizing, not learning because one can’t learn a social role after reading a book, although one can acquire knowledge how to do it. Each role includes various norms, rules and patterns of behaviour; it is locked with other roles by social contacts such as relations, rights, obligations. A human can’t simply learn all this. He should interiorize. So, interiorizing has a wider meaning than learning and includes learning as its part.

Socialization is a lifelong process because an individual, in his life, has to learn not one but a number of social roles while growing older, getting married or being promoted on the career ladder. People constantly change their habits, tastes, rules, behaviours up till the old age.

Socialization can be distinguished as deliberate and unconscious. Deliberate socialization refers to the socialization process when there is a deliberate and purposeful intent to convey values, attitudes, knowledge, skills etc., for instance, when parents are telling a child to always say “please. ”

Unconscious socialization occurs as a result of spontaneous interaction with no purposeful or deliberate attempt on the part of anyone involved to train, educate or the like. An example of such socialization is when the child learns to use vulgarity in a frustrating traffic situation by observing parents.

The aims of socialization are as follows:

* to instill disciplines, for instance, don’t walk in front of a moving car;
* to develop aspirations and ambitions, for instance, I want to be a banker, rock star, great sociologist;
* to develop skills, for instance, reading, driving etc.
* to enable the acquisition of social roles, for instance, male, student, son, worker etc.

Development of an individual should be considered in connection with the family, social group and culture he belongs to. His socialization begins from the very first hours of his life and traditionally includes five stages:

* childhood – in medieval European paintings children were portrayed as little adults. In modern societies the separate character of childhood is diminishing once more, for instance, some observers point out that even small children may watch the same TV programs as adults;
* the teenager – the concept of a teenager did not exist until recently. In modern societies, teenagers live between childhood and adulthood, growing up in a society subject to continuous change;
* young adulthood – young adulthood seems to be a specific stage in personal and sexual development in modern societies. Affluent youths take the time to travel and explore sexual, political and religious affiliations;
* mature adulthood – in modern societies, midlife crisis is very real for many middle-aged people;
* old age – in traditional societies, the elder people usually had a major say over matters of importance to the community. In industrial societies, they tend to lack authority within the family and the wider social community.

By character socialization can be primary and secondary with their agencies (institutions) or agents. Agencies of socialization are structured groups or contexts within which significant processes of socialization occur.

Socialization is further differentiated as primary and secondary. Primary socialization occurs in infancy and childhood and is the most intense period of cultural learning. Family is the main agent, or agency of socialization during this phase.

Secondary socialization takes place later in childhood and into maturity. Main agents (agencies) of socialization include schools, peer groups, organizations, the media and the workplace.

All agents involved in socialization of individuals are differentiated as informal and formal ones. The family and peers are typical informal agents of socialization and the school and mass media represent formal agents. For instance, peers become especially influential in schools. They provide opportunities to practice social roles, they are an important source of information, and they greatly influence values and attitudes in mate selection, sex relations, and forms of expression in music, sports and the like. It should be noted that some entities can serve as the agents of both primary and secondary socialization, for instance, peers of childhood and teenager period (primary) and peers at work (secondary).

Difference between primary and secondary forms also lies in the character of relations among humans. Primary socialization is the area of interpersonal relations that’s why most intensively it takes place in the first half of human life, although fading and going out slowly, it remains in the second half as well. Secondary socialization is the area of social relations and it occurs in the second half of human life whereby a person is faced with secondary agencies which have a great impact on developing personality.

A principle asserting that development of personality is a lifelong ascending process based on consolidating of the interiorized before, is indisputable. But personal qualities moulded before aren’t stable or unshakable for ever. When a person learns new roles, values or habits instead of those badly learnt before or obsolete, re-socialization occurs. It embraces a lot of activities – from lessons arranged to change the child’s reading skills to vocational retraining of workers.

Development of any person is determined by a number of factors:

* family – in any civilization, it is the main area of primary socialization of personality as it is characterized by a set of social norms, sanctions and patterns of behaviour which regulate interactions and relations among spouses, parents and children, other relatives. As a rule, a child learns those patterns of behaviour typical for its parents;
* relations of equality – including into “groups of equal”(friends, peers of same age) also has a great impact on the process of personal development. Interrelations among peers are more democratic as compared to those among parents and children. In such groups, individuals enter into various contacts with each other creating informal groups; they often keep these relations all their life;
* education – its importance is determined by the fact that the society ensures development of education and upbringing of the growing generations in accordance with the values, ideals, standards of behaviour typical for a given society. Education is a process and result of learning systematic knowledge, skills, and at the same time a necessary condition of preparing a person for labour activities;
* mass media (radio, press, TV, movie) are a most powerful factor of influence on human consciousness and behaviour that means that they influence on the socialization process;
* labour – the working process is an organizational framework within which an individual turns to a member of the labour collective. While turning to a worker, he learns not only professional roles but also gets to know what is to be an executive and subordinate, leader or outsider etc.;
* culture is a specific kind of activity aimed at creating spiritual and material wealth, so its result comes to be a system of ideals, values, norms and patterns of behaviour embodied in the social development of a person and his spiritual world;
* incomes play an important symbolic role. High incomes mean well-being, high professional qualification and good business aptitudes of personality;
* organizations such as youth associations, church, sport clubs also participate in the development of a person.

Thus, the development of a person is determined by a number of socio-economic factors, social factors being dominant.

At the same time the development of a person can’t avoid crises. An American psychologist and psychiatrist Erik H. Erikson (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/June\_151902-1994), who is also known for coining the phrase “identity crisis”, developed his theory on the social development of human beings with respect to the psychological analysis of S. Freud. E. Erikson described eight developmental stages of the Ego through which a human should pass from infancy to late adulthood. In each stage a person confronts new challenges which are hopefully mastered. Each stage builds on a successful completion of earlier stages. The challenges of stages which are not successfully completed may be expected to reappear as problems in the future. It should be noted that E. Erikson was the first to identify eight stages of development, later his students added two more to further refine adolescence and adulthood.

Thus, to E. Erikson, at each stage a human encounters the following crises:

* infancy (birth-18 months): trust versus mistrust;
* younger years (18 months-3 years): autonomy versus shame and doubt;
* early childhood (3-6 years): initiative versus guilt;
* middle childhood (6-12 years): industry versus inferiority;
* early adolescence (12-18 years): group identity versus alienation;
* later adolescence (18-22 years): Ego-identity versus identity confusion;
* early adulthood (22-34 years): intimacy versus isolation;
* middle adulthood (34-60 years): generativity versus stagnation;
* later adulthood (60-75 years): Ego-integrity versus despair;
* old age (75 years-death): immortality versus extinction.

According to E. Erikson, the Ego, around which the individual integrates a sense of identity, develops in the process of socialization. He, too, thinks the society plays an important role in moulding personality. He emphasized that socialization is a lifelong process which goes through cycles from infancy to adolescence to various states of young, middle, and elderly adulthood.

BASIC CONCEPTS

Agencies (agents) of socialization – structured groups or contexts within which significant processes of socialization occur.

Basis type (of personality) – a set of typical personality’s qualities which are dominant in the society and most fully meets the demands of a given society.

Deliberate socialization – a socialization process when there is a deliberate and purposeful intent to convey values, attitudes, knowledge, skills etc.

Extrovert – a person who tends to focus on the outer world and external events.

Frustrated personality – personality characterized by low self-assessment and depressive state.

Hedonistic materialist – a person who is oriented to satisfy his needs as consumer.

Homo consumer – a modern consumer, or personality moulded by mass society (by R. Dahrendorf).

Homo faber – a “working man”in the traditional society, or personality allotted with an important public function (by R. Dahrendorf).

Homo soveticus – a person depending on the state (by R. Dahrendorf).

Homo universalis – a person with the aptitude to perform various activities (by R. Dahrendorf).

Human being – a particular representative of mankind.

Idealist – a person who is critical towards traditional norms and firmly determined to self-development.

Individual – a particular representative of mankind.

Individuality – a set of qualities or characteristics distinguishing one person from another at the biological, psychological, social and other levels.

Introvert – a person who tends to focus on his inner world of ideas and experiences.

Man – a most common, generic concept for a representative of mankind.

One-dimensional man – a person who perceives informational stereotypes and moulds simplified schemes of seeing phenomena as black-and-white (by H. Marcuse).

Person – a particular representative of mankind.

Personality – a concept introduced to focus on the individual’s social nature.

Primary socialization – a socialization process which occurs in infancy and childhood and is the most intense period of cultural learning.

Psychological analysis – a psychological perspective of Sigmund Freud who considered a person as hedonist, or striving for getting satisfaction, with the society as a system of constraints and taboos.

Psychological structure (of personality) – a structure which includes personality’s subjective qualities such as various emotions, feelings, memory, abilities etc.

Realist – a person who can combine his strive for self-realization with a developed sense of duty.

Re-socialization – a socialization process which occurs when a person learns new roles, values or habits instead of those badly learnt before or obsolete.

Role theory – a theory positing that human behaviour is guided by expectations held by the individual and other people. The expectations correspond to different roles individuals perform or enact in their daily lives.

Secondary socialization – a socialization process which takes place later in childhood and into maturity.

Social structure (of personality) – a set of personality’s subjective and objective social qualities which are created and function in the process of his activity.

Socialization – a lifelong process by which, through contact with others, one becomes a self-aware, knowledgeable human being, skilled in the ways of a given culture and environment. Socialization suggests interiorizing of social roles and cultural norms.

Traditionalist – a person who is followed by values of duty, discipline, law; their level of self-realization, creativity is low.

Unconscious socialization – a socialization process which occurs as a result of spontaneous interaction with no purposeful or deliberate attempt on the part of anyone involved to train, educate or the like.

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