

WEEK TWELVE
Mon Nov 30, 2009
Tues Dec 1, 2009

CHANGING IDENTITIES AND EXITING ROLES

LECTURE OUTLINE

- 1. ROLE EXIT**
- 2. STAGES IN ROLE EXIT**
- 3. 11 PROPERTIES OF THE ROLE-EXIT PROCESS**

QUESTIONS OF THE WEEK

How do individuals exit or leave social roles?

What is the process of role exit?

WEEK TWELVE
Mon Nov 30, 2009
Tues Dec 1, 2009

CHANGING IDENTITIES AND EXITING ROLES

Detailed Lecture Notes

1. ROLE EXIT

Definition of Role Exit = the process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role (Helen Ebaugh, 1988. *Becoming an Ex: The Process of Role Exit*. University of Chicago Press)

EG: Exiting Religious Identity, Professional Athletes, Divorce

What is the Process of Role Exit?

1. Disengagement = the process of withdrawing from the normative expectations associated with a role

EG: structural components of a role are set aside

2. Disidentification = refers to the process of ceasing to think of oneself in the former role

EG: personal, social and collective aspects of identity are set aside

3. Learning New Roles = as exes disengage and disidentify, they actively learn new sets of role prescriptions
= a **process or resocialization**

4. Adjustment and Adaptation = a shift of self-identity whereby the individual incorporates the social role into his/her perception of self

FOUR STAGES IN THE ROLE EXIT PROCESS

1. DOUBTING

EG: *“After I had been in the navy about ten years, I realized that the navy was going through a very significant change. A lot of the old values and principles seemed to be suddenly considered outdated and so I started looking at myself as being a little bit slow to change or started questioning even if I wanted to change, what should my response be to changes. So I started deciding maybe I’m being just overly critical. I realized I don’t control the whole navy. Well, it tended to mount. It just tended to have cumulative effects and by the time I had about 16 years in, I saw the navy was changing faster than I was changing with it. I realized I’ve simply got to go. It was a relatively straightforward choice for me to make because when you seriously see yourself as being a square peg in a round hole, then there’s not too much of a choice to be made”*

EG: burnout As one ex-police officer said,

“It took me about three years to come to the realization that my idea of what I was going to do in law enforcement was wrong. At that time in my life, it was difficult for me to accept things as they were. I was trying to make them the way I thought they should be. I thought I would catch bad guys and help good guys and really do something for the community. It took me about three years to figure the system – the administration of justice system in general – doesn’t allow for that. And the department doesn’t have room for that. It is sad, but that’s the way it is.”

1st doubts lead to **cuing behaviour** which indicates discontent with a social role

Definition of cuing = those signs, conscious or unconscious, that an individual is dissatisfied in her/his current role and is seeking role alternatives

EG: crabby all the time?

2. SEEKING ALTERNATIVES

As one married woman said,

“You better look twice at what you’ve got now because single life is no bed of roses. It is not the heaven you are imagining. Bob makes good money and doesn’t beat you and provides a roof over your head. You’re crazy to give that up for pipe dreams.”

As one ex-addict said,

“I feel like a huge weight has been lifted off me.”

As one physician said,

“During the two years I was seriously thinking about leaving medicine, I found myself envying my friends in other jobs who worked eight to five, five days a week and had a lot more free time than I did. In fact, I became very reflective about how I would spend leisure time if I had it and I even found myself cultivating old hobbies I once enjoyed, like golf and fishing. As I look back now, I was probably anticipating my move and beginning to build bridges so I wouldn’t feel lost once I left my hectic involvement with patients.”

3. THE TURNING POINT

Definition = an event that mobilizes and focuses awareness on the fact that old roles are no longer desirable, combined with the realization that exiters have an opportunity to do something different with their lives

EG:

- a) **specific events**
- b) **“the last straw” events time-related factors**
- c) **excuses**
- d) **either/or alternatives**

3 Functions of Turning Points:

- a) the reduction of cognitive dissonance
- b) the opportunity to announce the decision to others
- c) the mobilization of the emotional and social resources needed to carry through the exiting process

A “vacuum experience” = the feeling that one has one’s feet in two worlds, both the past and the future

Bridges = help individuals move from one role to new roles, to incorporate past with future identities

EG: bridges = jobs, friends, family, hobbies

4. CREATING AN EX-ROLE

- 6 areas stand out in considering the major issues with which role exiters struggle

1. signaling to others

2. present cues

3. deal with intimate relationships

4. changes in friendship networks

5. relate to former group members

6. identification with the prior role

11 PROPERTIES OF THE ROLE-EXIT PROCESS

1. REVERSIBILITY

Definition: refers to whether or not the occupant of a role can return to the role he/she has exited

EG: list all the roles that are irreversible once exited

2. DURATION

Definition: refers to the length of time involved from 1st doubts to making a decision to exit as well as to length of time in adapting to a new status

EG: transsexuals must cross-dress and accept psychiatric evaluation for 6 months prior to sex-change surgery

3. SINGLE VERSUS MULTIPLE EXITS

Definition: some role exits necessarily or usually involve exits from related roles

EG: awarding child custody occurs at the time of divorce and alters the role of parent, in-law etc.

4. INDIVIDUAL VERSUS GROUP EXITS

Definition: exiters can leave an lone individuals or as part of a cohort of exiters

EG: leaving home; leaving college; graduating from medical school

5. DEGREE OF CONTROL

Definition: the degree of control an individual has over various aspects of the role exit process varies

EG: a divorced people relate to each other

6. SOCIAL DESIRABILITY

Definition: refers to the degree of social approval or disapproval of the exit

EG: ex-prostitute or ex-alcoholic

7. DEGREES OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Definition: refers to the degree to which society associates expectations and rituals with any aspect of the role-exit process

EG: widows who wear black for 5 years; retirement parties

8. DEGREE OF AWARENESS

Definition: refers to the extent to which a role exit is a conscious and deliberate act

EG: illness and the death exit

9. SEQUENTIALITY

Definition: refers to the specified progression of some exits

EG: medical students/law students get anxious just before their certification exams = a sequential progression from being a student to being a profession

10. CENTRALITY OF THE ROLE

Definition: refers to the saliency and importance of a given role to an individual's self-identity

EG: Ebaugh's study of the role-exit of nuns describes a role exit for individuals who have exited a role they consider central to their identity

11. VOLUNTARINESS

Definition: refers to the amount of choice an individual has in whether or not to exit a role

EG: unemployed people who are fired for factors beyond their control are involuntary role exits