

**PRESERVATION OF SELF-ESTEEM: A STUDY IN ROLE DISTANCE**

**CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES**

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PRESERVATION OF SELF-ESTEEM: A STUDY IN ROLE DISTANCE

by

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## ABSTRACT

The theoretical background for this exploratory study is drawn from two areas: (1) the social psychology of role distance and role distance behavior, and (2) the sociology of classroom behavior. An attempt is made to demonstrate that what has been theorized about role distance and role distance behavior does, in fact, take place in everyday life. The study concentrates on: (1) the circumstances in the classroom teaching situation under which both major and minor role distance occur, (2) the situational expressions of both true and false role distance behavior, (3) the dimensions along which role distance behavior develops among junior high school students, and (4) the distinctiveness of both varieties of role distance behavior among the patterns of activities of students in the classroom.

Two classrooms of a junior high school are selected for this investigation. A field design for the study of role distance and role distance behavior in the classroom is presented. It includes the operationalization of the concepts of role distance and role distance behavior, the procedures followed in gathering the data, and the methods used in analyzing it.

The findings clearly demonstrate the empirical viability of role distance and role distance behavior theory; hidden dimensions were discovered and new conceptual distinctions made. Minor role distance was found to be more prominent than major role distance, and true role distance behavior was enacted more often than false role distance behavior. Both types were enacted during general and specific class activities.



The categories of momentary expression, recurrent expression, and extended expression are generated from the data collected regarding situational expressions of role distance behavior.

Several, though not all, of the preconditions of role distance behavior are found in behavior other than role distance behavior. By an examination of these related phenomena enacted in role abandonment, fear of inadequate performance, dislike for teacher, attempting to attract a relevant audience, and student frolic, the empirical boundaries of role distance behavior are more clearly delineated.



## PREFACE

Many strategies and techniques are used by people to gain support for and elevate their self-images. One such technique is the enactment of "role distance" behavior. Erving Goffman coined this term to identify the desire among human actors to step out of or dissociate themselves from certain degrading expectations held of them as occupants of particular social identities.

The theoretical development of role distance and role distance behavior has advanced with only a minimum of empirical research. It has never been systematically tested for its empirical validity. This study, which is only exploratory in nature, was designed to investigate the empirical viability of this theory and to discover hidden dimensions and new conceptual distinctions.

Two junior high school classrooms in St. John's, Newfoundland, were selected as the setting for the study. I should like to thank the principal and the staff of the school for permitting me to observe in their classrooms and for their overall cooperation during the field research.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr. R. A. Stebbins, Head of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, for his direction and guidance.

To my wife, Eileen, for her understanding and help, I wish to express my sincere appreciation.

Wilfred B. W. Martin

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## CHAPTER I

### ROLE DISTANCE AND THE PRESERVATION OF SELF-ESTEEM

It is a commonplace observation that everywhere men try to maintain and even enhance their images of self by the use of diverse strategies and techniques. So strong is this tendency that on occasion human beings may even take their own lives when their views of themselves, as reflected in the eyes of significant friends and relatives, are seen to be degrading. "Altruistic suicide" is the name that Emile Durkheim gave to this kind of behavior.<sup>1</sup> The many strategies and techniques for supporting and elevating one's self-image have never been completely identified, although this has been a favorite theme of social science since its inception. Certain psychological defense mechanisms, such as projection and rationalization, may be understood, in part, as means of protecting the self-conception of the actor. People have often been observed to "fish" for compliments in order to garner the needed support for a particular social identity. It has been noted that interpersonal relationships are initiated and sustained partially on the basis of the requirement that men must have support for their various self-conceptions. Enduring

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<sup>1</sup>Emile Durkheim, Suicide, translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1951), pp. 217-241.



affective ties greatly facilitate this goal.<sup>2</sup>

Still another way in which self-esteem is preserved is through the enactment of "role distance" behavior. Erving Goffman coined this term to identify the desire among human actors to step out of or dissociate themselves from certain humiliating expectations held of them while performing roles in everyday life.<sup>3</sup> It seems that under a variety of circumstances individuals must behave in ways that are self-mortifying when viewed from the perspective of a certain reference group. Caught in the dilemma of being required to carry out the behavior before the eyes of those in the setting who regard their behavior as disgusting, the actor relies on certain mechanisms to communicate that he is not attached to this aspect of his role--he demonstrates to those others his role distance, thereby preserving his self-esteem.

Our central aims in this chapter are to discuss the nature of role distance and role distance behavior and to derive a research-problem leading to empirical investigation of these concepts. As preliminary to our review, however, a definition of certain key terms is in order.

#### Definition of Concepts

In the review of the literature on role distance, a number of concepts will be used which have spawned considerable confusion

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<sup>2</sup>George J. McCall and J. L. Simmons, Identities and Interactions (New York: The Free Press, 1966), p. 166.

<sup>3</sup>Erving Goffman, Encounters (Indianapolis, Ind.: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1961), pp. 85-152.



because of the variety of definitions given to them in the past.

Therefore, it is necessary to present the meaning of each term as I intend to use it in this study. Five concepts will be defined in this section: (1) role expectations, (2) role identities, (3) role performance, (4) role embracement, and (5) audience.

#### The idea of role

Gross and his colleagues<sup>4</sup> have cast the many definitions of role into a threefold classification. (1) The "normative culture pattern" category includes those definitions that refer to both the behavior and the behavioral standards of the occupant of a position. (2) In the "situational" category, a role is considered to be the situationally appropriate behavior. It is the individual's definition of his situation. (3) Some definitions portray a role as the actual behavior of an individual occupying a social position. In this category there are two subcategories of definitions; one emphasizing the functional implications of behavior, the other emphasizing the reciprocal nature of behavior. In order to avoid the problems created by the various definitions of this concept, this general idea of role will be divided into three specific and interrelated parts: role expectations, role identities, and role performances.

Role expectations cannot be completely understood from a normative point of view alone. It is also necessary to take into account the actual past behavior of occupants of a particular social identity.

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<sup>4</sup>Neal Gross, Ward S. Mason and Alexander W. McEachern, Explorations In Role Analysis: Studies of the School Superintendency Role (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1958), pp. 12-16.



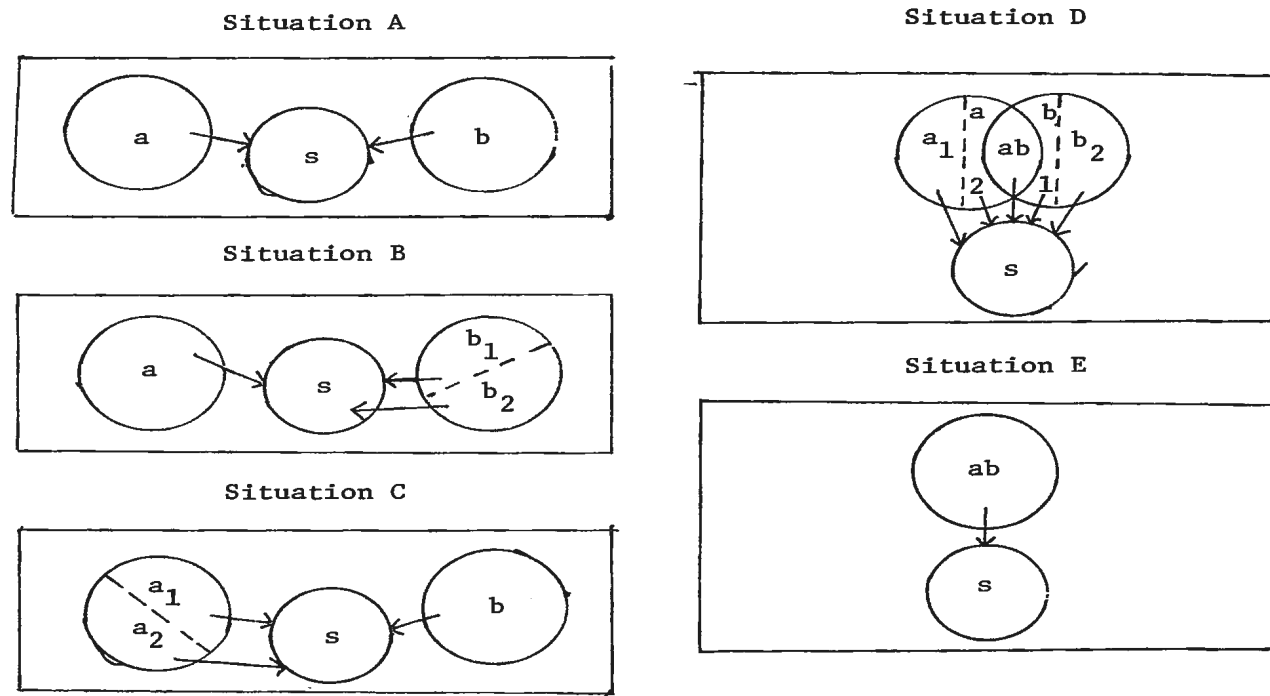
In other words, the expectations of a role can be subdivided into expected expectations and anticipated expectations.<sup>5</sup> The former are the culturally prescribed and sometimes proscribed behaviors or beliefs for an occupant of a social identity. The latter are the subjective probabilities that a particular incumbent will act in a particular way. Role expectations will be defined as the normative set of behaviors and beliefs either expected or anticipated from a person who occupies a particular social identity. Moreover, it is not only necessary to specify an individual's social identity, but it is also essential to know who holds the role expectations for the identity. Expectations may be normative to a culture, subculture, or group. The degree of consensus on the role expectations for a person in the identity of student in the classroom can be shown diagrammatically (Figure 1). This figure shows only five of a much larger number of theoretically possible situations.

The teacher's role expectations (a) for a student (s) may be completely different from the other students' expectations of "s" (Situation A, Figure 1). Situation B of this figure illustrates the case where two groups of students ( $b_1$  and  $b_2$ ) are not in agreement with regard to the role expectations of one or more students. Also, different teachers may hold different interpretations of the role expectations of a student or students (Situation C). The number of factions into which the students or teachers are divided may vary over a period of time. The predominant situation during the observational period of

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-59.





Key: a = role expectations held by teacher  
 b = role expectations held by student  
 s = student(s) for whom role expectations are held

Figure 1: Degree of Consensus on Expectations Held for Students in the Classroom



this study was where teachers were not in full agreement among themselves, nor was there total consensus among the students; rather there was some overlapping between the students and the teachers with regard to the role expectations which they held (Situation D). The seemingly ideal arrangement is presented in Situation E. Here both students and teachers are in complete agreement as to the role expectations that they hold for "s." The term overall role expectations will be used to refer to the role expectations which the teachers have for their students and which they attempt to get them to perform.

Role identity is an imaginative view that a person has of himself. It is partly an idealized conception of the way one likes to think of himself as being and acting as an occupant of a particular social identity. It also includes the person's conception of how he should be and act in that role.<sup>6</sup> These imaginations of self are not exercises in futility for, among other considerations, they play an important part in one's interpretations of role expectations. This is why we have both the anticipated and the expected aspects in role expectations. Furthermore, in an attempt to legitimize a particular role identity, an actor attempts to get support for it; that is, he attempts to act in such a way that responses will be elicited from others which will confirm his imaginative view of himself. This role support takes on considerable value to the person and may in fact become the major goal of a particular performance.<sup>7</sup>

Role performance is the actual enactment of the interpreted role expectations. While it is recognized that much of human drama takes

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<sup>6</sup> McCall and Simmons, op.cit., p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 75.



place in fantasy and imagination, it is with the overt performances that this study is concerned.

### Audience

For our purposes, it will be helpful to distinguish between the potential audience and the relevant audience. The former includes all of the people present in a given physical area. The latter consists only of those present who sustain or change an actor's self-conception. In order for all or part of the potential audience to become a relevant audience, either the members of the potential audience must be judging the actor's performance and the actor must realize this and be concerned about it, or the actor must assume that the potential audience or part of it is judging his performance while in actuality it is not. In other words, the essence of a relevant audience is that the actor believes that its members are judging his performance, and he is concerned about the results.

The potential audience of a student in the classroom teaching situation includes his teacher and his fellow students. When the teacher makes up the entire relevant audience of an actor, it will be referred to as the teacher-audience. When the relevant audience is made up of both the teacher and all or part of his fellow students, it will be called the teacher-pupil-audience. The term pupil-audience will be used to refer to a relevant audience comprised of only the actor's fellow students. The actor's fellow students may make up a multiplicity of audiences; that is, each person could be included in different interactive situations depending upon the scope of the momentarily or otherwise established social boundaries. For instance, in a social situation with a



potential audience of five, A, B, C, D, and E, a particular incident of behavior enacted by B might have A, C, and D as the relevant audience. On another occasion, B might have a different combination of this set as a relevant audience, say, Individuals A and E.

#### Role embracement

According to Goffman, three conditions must be met before a person can be said to embrace a role:

. . . an admitted or expressed attachment to the role: a demonstration of qualifications and capacities for performing it: an active engagement or spontaneous involvement in the role activity at hand, that is, a visible investment of attention and muscular effort.<sup>8</sup>

Embracement means to accept willingly the self that awaits one in the role and to demonstrate, with a fair degree of ability, this acceptance without concern for the response of the audience that is present. However, since the audience is an important factor in determining the sort of performance the actor gives, it is likely that the actor anticipates a favorable reaction from the relevant audience before he embraces a role.

#### Theoretical Background

The theoretical background of the present study is drawn from two areas: (1) the social psychology of role distance and role distance behavior, and (2) the sociology of behavior in the classroom teaching situation.

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<sup>8</sup>Goffman, op.cit., p. 106.



Role distance and role distance behavior

As long as an occupant of a social identity continues to enact a role, he is forced to adapt to, and to continue to give off, expressions that are congruent with the behavior expected of those in that identity. An individual may find himself in a social identity in which his role performance, as seen by him, will enhance his self-conception. In the enactment of such a role, he can be said to embrace it to the extent that his attitudes and modes of behavior are congruent with the image of the self available in the situation. These modes of behavior publicly confirm his acceptance of that image. It may also be that some role performances do not enhance the person's self-conception, nor do they undermine it. Under these circumstances the modes of behavior used during the performance neither confirm nor deny the acceptance of the self available in the role. However, it often happens that one finds himself in a status or social identity which requires behavior that is interpreted by one as being detrimental to his self-conception. Because of its threat to one's self-conception, one's attitude toward the enactment of such a set or part of a set of role expectations is that of dislike. This sentiment of dislike is called role distance.

Role distance, as Goffman<sup>9</sup> asserts, is a part of the "typical role" and not a part of the normative framework as Coser<sup>10</sup> supposedly demonstrates; that is, it is part of an interpretation of the normative

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>10</sup>Rose Coser, "Role Distance, Sociological Ambivalence, and Transitional Status Systems," American Journal of Sociology, LXXII (1966), 174.



framework. Role expectations are interpreted as desirable or undesirable, or the actor may be ambivalent about their meaning for him. The individual's recognition of the self available in the undesirable role expectations often leads to an unwillingness to accept this self.

Since role distance is an attitude, there is not only the question of its presence or absence but also its relative strength. When the role expectations are interpreted as being highly threatening to one's self-conception, the attitude has been referred to as "major role distance." When the enactment of the interpreted expectations is seen as only mildly threatening to one's self-conception it has been called "minor role distance."<sup>11</sup> Enactment of the first class of role expectations is significantly degrading to one's self-conception, whereas enactment of the second only shows one as being slightly odd.

By combining his own contribution, that role distance is an attitude,<sup>12</sup> with Coser's<sup>13</sup> idea of reference group, Stebbins has given a concise and yet fairly comprehensive definition of role distance:

Role distance can be defined as an attitude of dislike toward all or part of a set of role expectations which, when enacted, bring the threat of a loss of respect and at least momentary lack of support for one's self-conception from certain reference others present in the situation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Robert A. Stebbins, "Role Distance, Role Distance Behavior, and Jazz Musicians," The British Journal of Sociology, forthcoming.

<sup>12</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, "A Note on the Concepts of Role Distance," American Journal of Sociology, LXXIII (1967), 250.

<sup>13</sup>Coser, op.cit.

<sup>14</sup>Stebbins, "Role Distance, Role Distance Behavior, and Jazz Musicians," op.cit.



Even though the spontaneous and personal behavior of an individual in a role imbues the associated obligations with a special psychological appropriateness for him, there is, nevertheless, in all face-to-face situations a plethora of generally recognized cues that communicate, intentionally or unintentionally, a continued flow of information about each participant. Role distance behavior is a set of cues that is intentionally enacted to communicate the feeling of role distance. In each situation, a person first of all interprets the collectively held role expectations and observes the self that is available to him as an occupant of a particular status. If a particular relevant audience is present, or if the actor assumes that it is present, he not only carries out the requisite role expectations but he also enacts simultaneously activities that are extraneous to these expectations but which still form part of the anticipated aspect of the role. In the classroom situations depicted in A, B, C, and D of Figure 1, these extraneous activities are used to communicate to all or part of the relevant audience his loathness to accept the self inherent in the role.

The sort of performance that an actor gives is determined by the response that he wishes to elicit from the relevant audience. Role distance behavior is enacted to maintain or enhance one's self-esteem; thus one hopes to elicit a favorable response from the relevant audience. By definition, if there is no relevant audience present, there will be no one present from whom to elicit a favorable response and therefore no one to sustain one's self-conception. In such circumstances, it is not necessary to enact overtly role distance behavior, even though a role distance attitude may be present. It should be noted that in



the definition of the term audience subscribed to here the actor himself can be included in the audience. Under circumstances where the actor is the only member of the relevant audience, it is necessary only to express role distance behavior inwardly.

When carrying out role distance, the actor "is in an ecstatic state with regard to his 'world-taken-for-granted.'"<sup>15</sup> To wit, the act of stepping outside the normative restrictions of daily life is an exhilarating experience. In Goffman's words, taking role distance is the "'effectively' expressed pointed separateness between the individual and his putative role . . ."<sup>16</sup> It is the predictable behavior that is consciously carried out by the actor to help him keep his poise in the particular social situation. In other words, it is enacted to retain or to regain "support for one's self-conception from certain reference others present in the situation."<sup>17</sup>

There are two kinds of role distance behavior, "true role distance behavior" and "false role distance behavior."<sup>18</sup> True role distance behavior is an expression of a genuine role distance attitude (major or minor); the actor does not like the overall role expectations and he does not want the audience to get the impression that he likes them. False role distance behavior is fraudulent behavior. It is an attempt

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<sup>15</sup>Peter L. Berger, An Invitation to Sociology (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1963), p. 136.

<sup>16</sup>Goffman, op.cit., p. 108.

<sup>17</sup>Stebbins, "Role Distance, Role Distance Behavior, and Jazz Musicians," op.cit.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.



to show a dislike publicly for the self that is available in a particular role, whereas, in fact, the actual attitude toward this self is one of liking.

#### The sociology of classroom behavior

Research in the field of educational psychology has clearly demonstrated that styles of teaching are independent variables in the expression of student behavior in classroom teaching situations. The conventional division in teaching styles is between authoritarian and democratic. The former is "teacher centered" in that the teaching is done without consultation with the students. The latter is "student centered" because it involves discussion between the student and teacher in the classroom.<sup>19</sup> Even though it has been convincingly shown that "the evidence available fails to demonstrate that either authoritarian or democratic leadership is consistently associated with high productivity,"<sup>20</sup> all of the studies indicate that there are different expressions of behavior associated with each of these two basic styles of teaching.

To exemplify this, we shall turn to one of the most influential experiments in this area. Lippitt and White<sup>21</sup> report that there was a

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<sup>19</sup>A comprehensive bibliography and critical analysis of the experiments carried out on this topic is given in R. C. Anderson, "Learning in Discussion: A Resumé of the Authoritarian-Democratic Studies," in W. W. Charters and N. L. Gage, Readings in the Social Psychology of Education (New York: Allyn and Bacon, 1963), pp. 153-162.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>21</sup>Ronald Lippitt and Ralph K. White, "An Experimental Study of Leadership and Group Life," E. E. Maccoby, T. Newcomb and E. L. Hartley, Readings in Social Psychology (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958), pp. 496-511. See also, by the same authors, Autocracy and Democracy (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960).



significantly lower degree of hostility between members of their democratic group than between members of their authoritarian group. Their studies also show that in both authoritarian or democratic groups the children "neither like the teacher, nor work hard, nor behave well if there is a lack of leadership."<sup>22</sup>

The enactment of role distance behavior in the classroom is occasionally the result both of the teacher's power (the ability to obtain obedience) and the expression of authority (the legitimate use of his power). Role distance behavior is one of several possible responses by students to these forces. However, since the main concern of this study is to demonstrate empirically the presence of role distance and role distance behavior in two groups of students, the dimension of power will be peripheral to the discussion.

Becker<sup>23</sup> has reported that there is variation along social class lines in teacher-pupil relationships. This variation is due to the general attitudes that teachers have toward different social classes. One of Becker's respondents describes the lowest group:

They don't have the right kind of study habits. They can't seem to apply themselves as well. Of course, it's not their fault; they aren't brought up right. After all, the parents, in a neighborhood like that really aren't interested . . .<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>M. D. Shipman, The Sociology of the School (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1968), p. 139.

<sup>23</sup>Howard S. Becker, "Social-class Variations in the Teacher-Pupil Relationship," Journal of Educational Sociology, XXV (April, 1952), 451-465.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 454.



This is contrasted with a description of the children from the upper group:

In a neighborhood like this there's something about the children, you feel like you're accomplishing so much more. You throw an idea out and you can see that it takes hold. The children know what you're talking about and they think about it.<sup>25</sup>

The respondents were ambivalent about the middle group:

Well, they're very nice here, very nice. They're not hard to handle. You see, they're taught respect in the home and they're respectful to the teacher. They want to work and do well . . . of course, they're not too brilliant.<sup>26</sup>

It has been pointed out that in practice there is not complete agreement on the nature of the teacher-pupil relationship. Within any one classroom different teachers may have different role expectations for students of the same social stratum (Situation C, Figure 1). Different teachers may even have different role expectations for the same student. The following illustration is taken from my own research. When talking to one of the teachers about specific actions of some of the students in his class, he said:

I don't know what's wrong with Bill. He doesn't do anything--occasionally he gets his books out, but that's all. I don't care if he does or not, as long as he stays quiet and doesn't interrupt the other students who are trying to do something.

A different teacher made the following remarks when questioned about Bill:

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 454.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 455.



Bill is all right. Some teachers have trouble with him, but I don't. Occasionally, you know, sometimes I have to speak to him. He is average. He could do better. I guess he's like most of them, he'll pass.

Despite this de facto lack of agreement on the treatment of students in specific situations, Brookover<sup>27</sup> reported that there is a considerable amount of consensus among teachers concerning their general or broad role expectations of the students. He contends that most teachers see academic learning as the primary aim of their teaching, and learning to become well-adjusted adults as the secondary aim. Teachers generally expect students "to pay attention to classroom activity and to refrain from causing a disturbance of any kind,"<sup>28</sup> and to learn "the prescribed curriculum." In fact, they are expected "to learn whatever the teacher teaches."<sup>29</sup>

#### The classroom as a social situation

The classroom teaching situation is a relatively unique type of social situation. It has an established routine with relatively unequivocal physical, social, and temporal boundaries. The activities of both the students and the teacher are somewhat predetermined. Waller wrote, "A social situation has been set up and its pattern has been determined. The pattern is one which calls for a leader. The pattern governs also what the leader shall do with the led."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Wilbur B. Brookover and David Gottlieb, A Sociology of Education (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; New York: American Book Co., 1964), p. 465.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 462.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 465.

<sup>30</sup> Willard Waller, The Sociology of Teaching (New York: John Wiley and Sons', Inc., 1932), p. 189.



The series of classroom teaching situations have continuity along the lines of the main activity of teaching which involves presenting a given subject matter in a standard time span. Continuity can also develop through interpersonal relationships that originate and grow within the classroom setting. In classroom teaching situations, as in all social situations, interpersonal relationships emerge, in part, along the lines of the needs of the participants.

The relatively unequivocal boundaries of the classroom teaching situation make it an easily identifiable social situation. To some extent, the boundaries bind the people involved into the established taken-for-granted routine of this social system. The development of interpersonal relationships also means that there are relevant audiences present. The perspectives of these relevant audiences may and often do clash. For example, there may be different perspectives among students and between the teacher and the students (Figure 1). It is this combination of characteristics that makes the classroom an especially appropriate arena for the study of role distance and role distance behavior.

#### The definition of the situation

Before meaningful action can take place, the participants in any social situation must evaluate it in terms of their "principal action orientations." The principal action orientation is a "short-range goal," or one that can be satisfied in one or a few situations. It is distinguished from a "long-range goal" which requires a larger number of situations to satisfy its demands.<sup>31</sup> In the ideal classroom situation, the

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<sup>31</sup>Robert A. Stebbins, "Definition of the Situation, Encounter Definition, and the Meaning of Classroom Experiences," a paper read at a meeting of the Cabot Chapter of the Canadian College of Teachers, St. John's Newfoundland (November, 1967).



principal action orientation of the teacher is teaching and that of the students is learning. The teacher, in his attempt to carry out his principal action orientation, defines the situation by interpreting the immediate physiological, psychological, physical and social surroundings in which he finds himself. It is significant that the teacher's definition of the situation, because it is frequently based on an inadequate knowledge of the student's view of classroom activities, may ultimately force the student to behave in ways defined by him as degrading. The following incident, which I observed, is an example of this sort of problem. The teacher falsely accused Vincent of throwing an eraser across the school room. Vincent tried to exonerate himself but to no avail. The teacher said, "You will stay in your seat all recess time, which is only a minute or two from now." Vincent felt that it was degrading for him to have to sit in his seat while his friends were free to walk around the classroom or to leave it if they so wished. He despised the self that he saw in this role into which he had been forced. Thus he had a role distance attitude. This attitude was expressed by his mumbling while the teacher was present in the classroom and by his moving from his seat when the teacher left the classroom for a few moments.

The ideal of completely matched perspectives and goals is seldom present, at any one time, for all of the students in the classroom. Both the teacher and the students may have action orientations that should be subsidiary to the principal orientations characteristic of the ideal classroom setting. Yet these action orientations may become principal action orientations for the individuals concerned when their anticipated



fulfillment makes a noticeable contribution to the support of a significant role identity. Thus a student may act out a number of other roles as well as the role of student; for instance, school athletic hero or class buffoon. It is noteworthy that Coleman<sup>32</sup> has reported that high school boys have different orientations from those of high school girls. Athletic performance constitutes the role expectations of the boys, while a pleasing personality is the primary concern of the girls. However, both boys and girls must try to find ways to integrate their respective value structures with the different expectations held of them by their teachers and their fellow students and to communicate their dislike for the perceived degrading selves which may be encountered. Depending upon his values, the student will resolve any contradictions in the requirements by means of true or false role distance behavior. We shall now look at an instance of each of the varieties of role distance behavior from one of the groups observed in this study.

Teachers expect students to sit in their seats and to be attentive when a lesson is being taught. However, Gerald's dislike for these requirements when a particular subject was being taught led him to express true role distance behavior. He did this by continually engaging in activities that were extraneous to the expectations the teacher held of him, although not extraneous to the expectations held by his fellow students. Most of his fellow students expected him to be "always doing something." He moved around unnecessarily; he would stand up by his seat and look across the classroom; he would pick up small pieces of

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<sup>32</sup>James Coleman, The Adolescent Society (New York: The Free Press, 1961), pp. 11-57.



paper that were on the floor four or five feet away from his desk; and sometimes he would move his entire supply of books from inside his desk, place them on top of it, and then move them back into his desk again. The teacher told me that he knew that Gerald did not like the course; he remarked, "Sometimes I leave him alone and other times I force him to do his work."

In many junior high schools as well as in senior high schools the "curve raiser" is often ostracized by his fellow students. For some of these curve raisers, being an outcast is a demeaning status. Yet they want to continue to achieve high grades. Eric, one of the brightest students observed by the author, faced such a conflict. He resolved it by expressing false role distance behavior. He told me that he never talked about his marks to other students, and sometimes he pretended not to understand some of the topics that the students talked about while in actual fact he understood them very well. He explained, during a conversation I had with him, "I pretend not to know as much as I do."

#### The Research Problem

Role distance, as an area of scholarly interest, is long on theoretical developments and short on empirical research. Indeed, with the exception of Levitin's study,<sup>33</sup> there are no empirical studies of any kind, so far as this author is aware. Since the collected ideas on role distance presented earlier have never been systematically tested for

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<sup>33</sup> T. E. Levitin, "Role Performance and Role Distance in a Low Status Occupation: The Puller," The Sociological Quarterly, V (1964), 251-260.



their empirical validity, it was decided that the first order of business is to attempt to demonstrate that what has been theorized does, in fact, take place in everyday life. The classroom is believed to be an ideal place to investigate the attitude of role distance and its expression in role distance behavior. Specifically, the study concentrates on: (1) the circumstances in the classroom teaching situation under which both major and minor role distance occur, (2) the situational expression of both true and false role distance behavior, (3) the dimensions along which role distance behavior develops among students, and (4) the distinctiveness of both varieties of role distance behavior among the behavior patterns of students in the classroom. Following the empirical demonstration of role distance, future research problems will be delineated.



## CHAPTER II

### A FIELD DESIGN FOR THE STUDY OF ROLE DISTANCE AND ROLE DISTANCE BEHAVIOR

A junior high school was selected on the basis of my acquaintance with the principal and his staff, and two grade eight classrooms within the school were chosen as the setting for this study. One of the classrooms contained thirty-seven pupils, the other, thirty-eight; together these seventy-five students comprised the total group of respondents for the investigation. The first part of this chapter gives a description of the setting in which the research took place, which will be followed by a detailed discussion of the study design, the procedures employed in carrying out this design, and the methods of analysis used.

#### The Setting

From the theoretical background presented in the previous chapter, we learned that the classroom teaching situation is a relatively unique social situation. This uniqueness is brought on by the nature of its physical, temporal, and social boundaries. The four walls provide relatively efficacious physical boundaries within which the principal action orientation of the teaching situation is carried out. The frequent opening of the door and the presence of transparent glass in the windows, however, cause objects and events extraneous to the principal



action orientation to encroach upon the visual and aural senses. Such stimuli affect the students' psychological set and hence their definition of the situation.

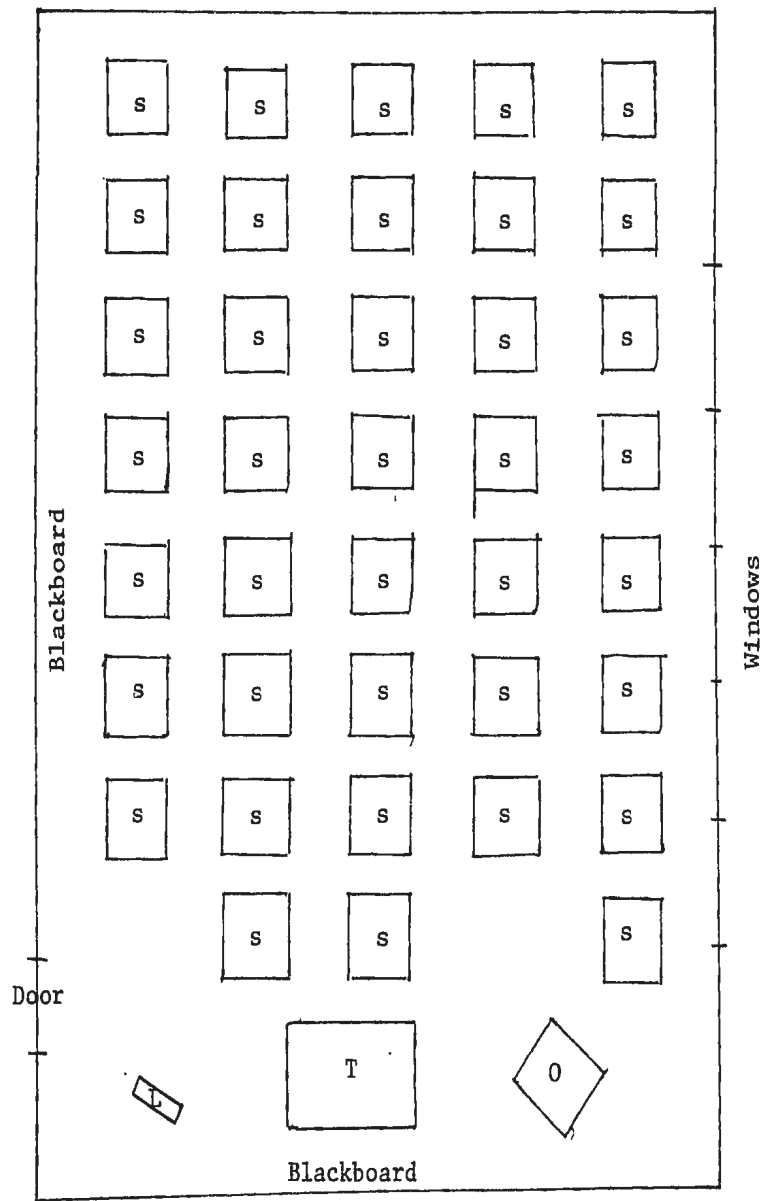
The two classrooms involved in this field research are of identical layout (Figure 2). There are two blackboards, one on the front wall and one on the wall to the right of the students. The teacher's desk is centered in the front of the room; it faces the students' desks, which are placed in rows of seven or eight, running parallel to each other at a distance of two to three feet apart. Each student has his own seat. It is in a fixed location that has been selected by the student when the school year began or the student has been moved to this location by the teacher for disciplinary reasons. The students are not allowed to move to another seat or to move their seats without receiving permission from the teacher present at the time.<sup>1</sup> Eight of the nine teachers who taught these two groups of students had never granted such permission. When the ninth teacher is in the classroom, some of the students sneak from their seats to others that happen to be vacant, and some change seats with each other. Of course, the students move only when it appears to them that the teacher is not looking.

The temporal boundaries of the classroom teaching situation are fixed outside of it. The boundaries that are our main concern here are the daily ones. These are manifested in the seven forty-five-minute

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<sup>1</sup>It should be noted that it was the teachers and not the students who moved from one classroom to another between periods. The exception was four students in Group A. These four left the classroom for one period each day because they were doing a subject in grade nine. This procedure was an experiment in subject promotion that was being carried out, for the first time, in the school.





Key: L = lectern

T = teacher's desk

O = observer's desk

s = student's desk

Figure 2: Physical Layout of Classrooms



periods that occur between 9:00 A.M. and 3:45 P.M., five days a week. Except for the minute or two when the teachers move from one classroom to another between the class periods, only two breaks take place in the daily teaching routine. One of these breaks is in the morning and the other is at noon.

The relevant audience determines the social boundaries. Just as the relevant audience may or may not be extended to include the entire potential audience, the social boundaries may include all or only a few of the individuals within the confines of the physical boundaries of the classroom. The social boundaries that exist for any given student or teacher at a particular time will depend upon his immediate principal and subsidiary action orientations.<sup>2</sup>

#### Study Design and Operationalization of Concepts

Since the primary scope of this investigation is to demonstrate the suppositions of role distance, thereby achieving a greater familiarity with, and new insights into, this phenomenon, it can be classified as an exploratory study. Selltiz and her associates have discussed the functions of this kind of research:

Many exploratory studies have the purpose of formulating a problem for more precise investigation or of developing hypotheses. An exploratory study may, however, have other functions: increasing the investigator's familiarity with the phenomenon he wishes to investigate in a subsequent, more highly structured, study, or with the setting in which

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<sup>2</sup>This is a specific example of Dr. Stebbins' statement. "The social limits of the subjective situation are set by the interaction requirements of the individual's action orientation." Robert A. Stebbins, "A Theory of the Definition of the Situation," Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, IV (1967), 153.



he plans to carry out such a study; clarifying concepts; establishing priorities for further research; gathering information about practical possibilities for carrying out research in real-life settings; providing a census of problems regarded as urgent by people working in a given field of social relations.<sup>3</sup>

Before the investigator could launch into the actual study designed to provide the sort of information characteristic of exploratory research, two problems in the operationalization of concepts had to be confronted and solved. (1) What behavior constitutes role distance behavior (major and minor)? (2) Once an action has been identified as role distance behavior, how do we classify it as true or false role distance behavior, or some other type yet unknown?

With respect to the first problem, it was recognized that the amount of physical movement and vocal behavior of any student during a regular forty-five-minute period can be both sizeable and chaotic. At some times in the classroom, instances of behavior are relatively continuous or fused, while at others they are more discrete. In the former, a series of incidents of behavior are enacted over a short period of time. If role distance behaviors are involved, the question arises as to whether all or part of them make up a single occurrence of this type of behavior. In other words, is all the behavior used to communicate an attitude of dislike, or is it interspersed with behavior other than role distance behavior? The discrete instances of behavior are, by definition, more easily recognized. Usually they do not involve a series of incidents unless enacted simultaneously or in an uninterrupted sequence. The

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<sup>3</sup>Claire Selltiz, et.al., Research Methods in Social Relations, rev. ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1959), p. 51.



problem also arises here, in some degree, as to what constitutes a separate and distinct movement of expression. Stebbins' conceptualization of role distance behavior presented in the previous chapter had led to the establishment of guide lines to surmount some of these problems. He has formulated six general modes of role distance behavior that were demonstrated to be in use among jazz musicians:

1. Presence of special vocal behavior; e.g.  
Grunts, speech, laugh, etc.
2. Absence of ordinary vocal behavior
3. Presence of special gestures: e.g.  
face, hands, body movements, etc.
4. Absence of ordinary gestures
5. Presence of special deeds
6. Absence of ordinary deeds<sup>4</sup>

"Ordinary" behavior is, for the most part, behavior that is conventionally "expected"; it is part of the "role expectations" in the terminology of Gross and his colleagues.<sup>5</sup> The "special" behaviors are part of the "anticipated" role expectations.

Before going into the field, I attempted to recall, from my own teaching experience, examples of student behavior that fit into each of the general modes. A list of these examples was then compiled and submitted to a panel of three teachers. Their suggestions were incorporated into the final inventory, which is presented in Tables 1 and 2. Neither the absence of ordinary behavior nor the presence of special behavior always signifies role distance behavior, so that our tabulated instances

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<sup>4</sup>Robert A. Stebbins, "Role Distance, Role Distance Behavior, and Jazz Musicians," British Journal of Sociology, forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup>Neal Gross, Ward S. Mason, and Alexander W. McEachern, Explorations in Role Analysis; Studies of the School Superintendency Role, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1958), p. 59.



TABLE 1

## POTENTIAL ROLE DISTANCE BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Presence of special vocal behavior
  - a) coughing
  - b) whispering
  - c) sneezing
  - d) grunts
  - e) laughs
2. Absence of ordinary vocal behavior
  - a) remaining silent while the rest of the class is discussing a particular topic
  - b) not answering when asked a direct question by the teacher
3. Presence of special gestures
  - a) slumping back in the seat
  - b) resting head on desk or on hands
  - c) grinning
  - d) looking out the window
  - e) teasing student(s)
  - f) making faces (especially by students who are in the positions that are not readily seen by the teacher, e.g., students in the back of the room)
4. Absence of ordinary gestures
  - a) keeping the hands, face and body unusually still
  - b) daydreaming
  - c) arms folded
  - d) hands folded on the desk
  - e) hands in pockets (male students)
5. Presence of special deeds
  - a) moving desk or chair
  - b) dropping objects, e.g., pencils, pens, erasers, etc.
  - c) making more than the ordinary amount of noise when opening and closing books
  - d) note passing
  - e) marking on the desk
  - f) playing with objects
6. Absence of ordinary deeds
  - a) not taking out notebook or textbook when a particular subject is being taught
  - b) not writing down notes that are put on the board or dictated by the teacher



can only be said to be potential modes of role distance behavior. It is also important to note that while these examples are analytically separable they are often indistinguishable in actuality. The setting considered in Table 2 is the teaching situation that is the focus of the experimental observational period, a phase of this study that will be explained later in this chapter. These lists proved to be extremely useful as a guide, especially at the beginning of the field research, in looking for incidents of role distance behavior.

TABLE 2  
POTENTIAL ROLE DISTANCE BEHAVIOR WHEN A STUDENT  
PRESENTS A REPORT

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Presence of special vocal behavior</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) coughing</li> <li>b) sneezing</li> <li>c) speaking with an extremely loud voice</li> <li>d) speaking with an extremely low voice</li> <li>e) speaking too fast</li> <li>f) speaking too slow</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. <u>Absence of ordinary vocal behavior</u><br/>a long silence while pretending to be determining what to say next</li> <li>3. <u>Presence of special gestures</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) moving hands in and out of one's pockets (male students)</li> <li>b) if standing in front of the class, the student may walk back and forth while talking</li> <li>c) if sitting, the student may move around a lot in his or her seat</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. <u>Absence of ordinary deeds</u><br/>standing or sitting extremely still</li> </ol> |
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In order to determine which of the observed actions are genuine examples of role distance behavior and which are not, self-report question-



naires were given to the students and formal and informal interviews carried out with them. The information gathered by all four techniques (observation, questionnaires, formal, and informal interviews) complemented each other. The data concerning each expression of behavior were synthesized and a decision was made as to which category it fitted (true role distance behavior, false role distance behavior, or neither of these).

Six preconditions had to be met before an action or set of actions could be considered to be true role distance behavior:

1. A dislike for all or part of the overall expectations.
2. A feeling of being compelled to enact these expectations.
3. A high subjective probability that a relevant audience  
is present.
4. A fear of losing respect and hence a loss of support  
for one's self-image if the audience is not  
informed of his dislike for the overall role  
expectations.
5. As a result, a desire to communicate this dislike.
6. Satisfactory enactment of overall role expectations  
in spite of the role distance toward them.

In addition, six preconditions are essential to false role distance behavior:

1. A liking for all or part of the overall role expectations.
2. A feeling of being compelled to enact these expectations.
3. A high subjective probability that a relevant audience  
is present.



4. A desire to communicate to the audience that he has  
a dislike for the overall role expectations  
while in actuality he does not dislike them.
5. A fear, brought on by this desire, of degrading  
remarks from the audience if it finds out that  
he likes these expectations.
6. Satisfactory enactment of the overall role expectations.

The decision as to whether each occurrence of role distance behavior represented major or minor role distance was made after the answers to the questions, "Did you enjoy the period?" and "Why did you enact the different incidents of behavior?" and the relevant information of the informal interviews was analyzed and synthesized. The situational expressions that were used for each incident of role distance behavior were also considered.

#### The Procedures

An attempt was made to become acquainted with the students individually and yet to interpret their feelings and behaviors objectively. The entire six-week period of the field research was spent in the school. During the recess and lunch breaks, I associated with the students by standing in line with them at the canteen and eating my lunch in the students' kitchen rather than in the area designated for the staff. The procedure involved the use of semi-structured techniques in the classroom (observation, questionnaires, and formal interviews) with the use of unstructured techniques outside of it (observation and informal interviews) in an attempt to explore the attitudes behind the different expressions of behavior. In the following sections of this chapter, a detailed dis-



cussion of the methods of observation, the items in the questionnaire, and the nature of the formal and informal interviews will be presented. Here we shall see how these data-gathering techniques are used to yield information that is pertinent to the central problems of this study.

#### The observational period

The observational period in the classroom was divided into three specific parts: (1) a getting-acquainted phase, (2) an experimental phase, and (3) a general class phase. The chief aim in each phase was to observe and record the incidents of behavior that were not part of the overall normative framework and to note the circumstances in the classroom in which these incidents occurred. In all three phases, I entered each classroom as a nonparticipant observer and sat facing the students in one of the front corners of the room (see Figure 2). This location was chosen in an effort to minimize the effects on the students of my presence while simultaneously giving me an unobstructed view of their actions and facial expressions.

The fact that I took the role of observer in the classroom meant that it was possible that my presence would influence student behavior to a greater or lesser degree. The nine teachers who taught in the classrooms during my observation unanimously agreed that the students' behavior in general was only slightly modified during the first two days of observation, and that some students were not influenced at all by my presence.

The rigid seating plan enforced in the classroom made the task of getting acquainted with the students and recording their incidents of behavior and the circumstances in which each incident occurred much easier than it would have been had the seating arrangement been more flexible.



The two classrooms were studied simultaneously during the research by alternating between them. I observed for two or three periods in each classroom every day. During each period in each classroom, I selected and observed two to five students who were in physical proximity to one another. The number observed was partially determined by the amount of potential role distance behavior enacted by the students. When some of the students became engaged in a great deal of this sort of activity, then only a small number of them could be observed at any one time, usually only one or two. When there was little potential role distance behavior, then four or five of them could be observed simultaneously. Whenever an event happened in another part of the classroom that seemed to be worthy of note, it was recorded and then examined after the class period was over. Let us turn now to the specific parts of the observational period.

The Getting-Acquainted Phase (AP). Although the entire field research period could be classified as an AP, here I am referring only to the first three days of the study. They were different from the rest of the observational periods in that I had to build a rapport with the students, whereas in the other phases the task was to add to and maintain that rapport. In addition to its getting-acquainted function, the AP had two other purposes. Firstly, it was used to pretest the questionnaires to be used and the approach to be taken at the formal interviewing of the students during the main part of the research. Secondly, it was an initiating phase whereby I became familiar with the methods of nonverbal communication used in the classroom. At the first forty-five-minute class period of the AP, I was introduced to each class by the teacher as a



university student studying teaching situations. The students were also informed that I would be sitting in the classroom as an observer for a period of five or six weeks. Immediately after my introduction, the teacher left the classroom and I gave a sociometric test<sup>6</sup> to the students. I told them that from time to time I would be giving them questionnaires to be completed, and that occasionally I would like to interview them concerning happenings in the classroom. The students were told that their responses would be kept in the strictest confidence and that not even the teacher would see the questionnaires or gain access to the data in them. By stressing this condition, it was hoped to minimize the students' desires to distort their views so as to present an image more acceptable to the teacher.

The Experimental Phase (EP).--In the EP, each student was observed while presenting an essay to the class and answering the questions that other students asked after the presentation had been made. Arrangements for this assignment were made a week before I went to the classroom. It was planned that the geography teacher would give the students a list of four topics from some aspect of his course, with instructions to do research on any one of them, prepare a paper on it, and be ready to present that paper in class and answer any questions the other students or the teacher might ask relating to the topic, especially on the material presented.

This assignment was given to the students one week before I went to the classroom, so that they would not connect it with my study. If the students knew that the main reason for the assignment was for me to observe them during the presentation of it to the class, it undoubtedly

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<sup>6</sup>The sociometric test is presented in Appendix D.



would have had an influence on the entire project. The geography class was chosen for three reasons: (1) The marks of the students in geography were distributed in a way that approximated the normal curve. From this information it was concluded that some liked and some disliked geography. The students on the left-hand tail of the curve would be the ones most likely to have a negative attitude toward the subject. (2) I taught geography for one year and felt that I was more familiar with the subject matter than with any of the other subjects taught in this grade. (3) I recalled from my own teaching experience incidents of behavior that were enacted during presentations of essays in geography (see Table 2). In retrospect, some of these incidents appeared to have been role distance behavior.

The EP involved six forty-five-minute teaching periods in each classroom. The timetables of the classroom were arranged in such a way that it took two weeks for all of the essays to be presented.

The General Class Phase (GP).--This terminology refers to the periods during which the general classroom teaching was observed. These situations are different from that of the EP in that they are the day-to-day routine experiences in the classroom where the teacher teaches a lesson, asks a few questions, and possibly leads a discussion.

The GP followed immediately after the AP, and it continued to the end of the research with the exception of the EP. It was different from the AP in that, by the beginning of the GP, I had a knowledge of some of the idiosyncratic behavioral expressions of the students and, consequently, I was able to carry out a more intensive program of investigating the attitudes behind these expressions. The time between the experimental



teaching situations was spent observing general teaching situations, so that both the EP and GP were carried out during different periods of the same day.

### The questionnaires<sup>7</sup>

During the observation of the students' behavior, it became obvious that some of the incidents involved true role distance behavior while others involved false role distance behavior. It was easier to identify the former than the latter. For much of the behavior observed, however, it was not clear what meanings were being communicated. The questionnaires were designed to help in this regard; they were used to record the students' general attitudes toward the particular class period in question and to examine the incidents of behavior noted during the observational period and the intentions behind these incidents. The questionnaire employed during the GP will be referred to as Questionnaire A (see Appendix A). Questionnaire B (see Appendix B) was used during the EP.

Questionnaire A.--The first item in this instrument was designed to elicit the students' general attitude toward the self interpreted to be available in the role expectations of the class period that had just ended.<sup>8</sup> It is assumed that, for a person to like a particular role

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<sup>7</sup>The two questionnaires used during the field research are presented in Appendices A and B.

<sup>8</sup>The class periods observed include a total of nine subjects: history, geography, literature, English, spelling, art, mathematics, civics, and words are important. This last subject got its name from the textbook used in it. It consists of teaching the pronunciation and spelling of words together with the learning of meanings. Several study periods were also observed.



performance, it must be seen by the actor as contributing positively to his self-conception. Conversely, disliking may be brought about by the insignificant contribution or the negative contribution that the actor believes the enactment of a role makes to his self-conception.

The second question was asked in order to discover the attitudes of role distance instrumental in the expression of role distance behavior. It was used to probe for the specific behaviors, if any, that each individual used to communicate to others that he was not enjoying the period.

By asking the students if they tried to communicate to other students that they did not like the period in question, while in fact they liked it, the third question solicited incidents of behavior that were enacted with the intention of giving a false impression. The behavior that camouflaged the actual attitude of liking with one of disliking was false role distance behavior.

Questionnaire B.--Question Number 1 is, "Did you like doing the paper?" It was designed to elicit the attitudes of the students toward work on the assigned project in geography. Answers to Item 2(a) gave insight into the attitudes the students held toward the self available in the role of presenting their papers before the class. When the answer to this part of the question was "No," the answer to Part "c," which asked, in effect, "Why did you not like giving the paper in class?" indicated to some degree whether or not the attitude of dislike was role distance. By asking the respondent to list the kinds of behavior he enacted to let others know of his dislike for the role, and the kinds of behavior he enacted to convince students that he held an attitude of dislike albeit a false one, it was hoped that Items 4 and 5 would isolate incidents of true role distance behavior and of false role distance behavior, respectively.



### The interviews

Before each interview the behavior observed for each student during the AP, EP, and GP was compared with the answers the student gave to questions requesting him to explain how he communicated that he disliked what was expected of him. The observed actions were also compared with the kinds of behavior reportedly used to communicate false impressions. From these comparisons, the observational behavior was placed into one of two categories: (1) the incidents the respondent reported<sup>9</sup> and (2) the behavior recorded during the observational period but not reported by the respondent.

The Semi-structured Formal Interviews.--Some of the questions in these interviews were standardized<sup>10</sup> for all students, while others arose out of the interview itself. The standardized questions were used only as guides, and the students were encouraged to talk freely about their attitudes toward the different activities they were expected to engage in and the behavior they enacted while pursuing them. The term "formal" is used to designate that the interviews were held by appointments at a fixed time and place.

The semi-structured formal interviews were also used to ascertain whether the students recalled the incidents of behavior observed during the observational period but not reported by them. The reasons for each incident of behavior that each student carried out during the observational

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<sup>9</sup>Some of these incidents coincided with those recorded during the observational period.

<sup>10</sup>The complete list of standardized questions that were used during the semi-structured formal interviewing is given in Appendix C.



periods and the circumstances under which these incidents arose were investigated as well.

In the first question, the respondents were asked to explain why they enacted each of the behavioral expressions they had listed on the two questionnaires. When there was a second list, that is, when the incidents of observed behavior were different from those the respondents reported on their questionnaires, each respondent was asked if he enacted any or all of the incidents of behavior that I had observed. No other question was asked concerning the incidents which the respondent said he did not enact. For those incidents that the respondent enacted, he was asked to explain why he behaved in this particular way. Also, for each of the incidents that the respondent enacted, an attempt was made to have him reconstruct, verbally, the specific circumstances in the classroom in which the incident occurred.

The Informal Interviews.--The informal interviews were not structured in that there were no standardized questions used in them. They are referred to as informal because they were carried out in general conversation with the students in the corridors, in the lunch room, and anywhere the opportunity arose. The informal interviews were used for three purposes: (1) to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of rapport with students, (2) to augment the information obtained by the semi-structured formal interviews, and (3) to increase the validity of the information used in making decisions about which attitudes were role distance and which incidents of behavior were role distance behavior.

The informal interviews did not always concern events in the classrooms but often consisted of general conversation about sports' events,



other activities in the school, and about the students' extramural interests. Even though I conversed about specific incidents of behavior that were enacted in the classroom only where it was deemed appropriate, the students made comments on a variety of subjects that were extremely helpful in categorizing their idiosyncratic expressions of behavior. Remarks that were applicable to this research were made about such factors as their general feelings toward school and toward particular classroom situations and incidents of behavior enacted during these situations. They often talked about their conceptions of themselves and their relationships to other students, which included remarks about the expectations they thought other students had of them and their expectations for other students in the different circumstances that arose within the classroom teaching situations. They also commented on the consequences of the fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of these expectations by both parties. Having been made aware of the incongruities that often exist between statements that students make under different circumstances,<sup>11</sup> the statements made in the informal interviews were verified, where possible, in formal interviews.

#### The Method of Analysis

In exploratory research, there is little merit in excessive rigor and premature quantification when our objectives are to demonstrate the

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<sup>11</sup>Howard S. Becker has pointed out the need to appraise the evidential value of statements made by students under different circumstances. It depends on "whether they have been made independently of the observer (volunteered) or have been directed by a question from the observer." See Howard S. Becker, "Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation," American Sociological Review, XXIII (December, 1958), 655.



empirical viability of role distance theory and by so doing to discover new hidden dimensions and conceptual distinctions. Consequently, the results of this study will not be analyzed by means of explanatory statistics. Nor will the representativeness of our sample be an issue, since we do not intend to make claims about the frequency of role distance and role distance behavior in the population of junior high school students in the community.<sup>12</sup> An intensive analysis will be undertaken of the situational expressions and the circumstances under which the thirty-four examples of true role distance behavior and the seven examples of false role distance behavior reported in the study arose. The dimensions along which these incidents of role distance behavior developed will be explored. An analytical and categorical presentation of expressions of behavior that are peripheral to role distance behavior will also be presented.

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<sup>12</sup>Zetterberg has pointed out that representativeness is of relatively minor importance in studies strictly concerned with theoretical verification. This "is in sharp contrast to the overwhelming importance of representativeness of sample in descriptive studies." See Hans L. Zetterberg, On Theory and Verification in Sociology (3rd ed.; Totowa, New Jersey: Bedminster Press, 1965), pp. 128-130.



## CHAPTER III

### ROLE DISTANCE AND ROLE DISTANCE BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM

This chapter contains a discussion of three of the problems which the field research was designed to investigate: (1) the circumstances under which both major and minor role distance occur, (2) the situational expressions of true and false role distance behavior, and (3) the dimensions along which role distance behavior develops.

#### Circumstances

In discussing the circumstances under which role distance occurs, we shall look at the activities within the classroom, the importance of a relevant audience, and the actor's interpretation of his relationship with the rest of the students in the classroom. The part each plays in the development of both major and minor role distance as it is seen in the expression of role distance behavior will be analyzed.

#### Classroom activities

The classroom activities will be divided into two general categories:

- (1) the activities that require the attention of all the students in the classroom, which shall be referred to as general class activities, and
- (2) the activities that require the attention of only specific students, which shall be referred to as specific class activities.



### General class activities

It is necessary to divide this general category into two more specific categories: activities in which particular students arouse the attention of the entire class and activities in which the attention of the entire class is obtained without the vehicle of particular students. The former will be referred to as student activities. They include the teacher asking specific students questions related to the subject matter being taught at the time, having specific students do mathematical problems on the blackboard, and having them read aloud to the class.<sup>1</sup> The activities of the EP of this study are also included in this category. The activities which require the attention of the entire class without using any one student to secure it include lecturing by the teacher and seat-work<sup>2</sup> from the students.

Student Activities.--The students who executed the specific activities were observed and interviewed with regard to the behavior they enacted and their attitudes behind these expressions. When Calvin was told to read the part of a poem that contained the answer to a specific question, he said, "I can't find it, Sir." After a minute or so he found the correct part of the poem and began to read in an extremely low voice. In a formal interview, Calvin said, "I pretended I couldn't find it . . . because I have problems reading out loud." He did not like the self available in the role of reading to the class and he thought that, if he pretended that he could not find the right part, the teacher would not

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<sup>1</sup>Some of the students in one of the classrooms were observed reading poetry to the rest of the class.

<sup>2</sup>The term "seatwork" is used by the teachers to refer to the written work which they have assigned to the students, which is also how it is used here.



wait but would ask someone else to read. This alternative did not happen, however. The teacher waited for Calvin, who read, and who expressed an attitude of role distance by speaking in a low voice without putting any feeling or expression into his reading. This incident represented an attitude of major role distance. Calvin interpreted the role expectations as being highly threatening to his self-conception, so much so that he tried to escape them altogether. Gladys and Charlie enacted true role distance behavior as a result of the minor role distance which they held toward the self they saw available to them in the role expectations of reading to the class. Gladys hesitated momentarily and looked around the classroom before starting to read. Charlie intentionally paused and sighed during the three times that he was reading. Calvin's low voice and Charlie's pausing and sighing did have meaning to others in the class. The exact number in their relevant audiences is not known, but in both cases Joe and Melvin understood the messages of the readers' dislike for what they were doing. While it was not definitely established that Gladys did not have a relevant audience, it appeared as if her assumption that a relevant audience was present was incorrect. She said that at first she thought she had an audience, but later she was not sure if anyone had received the message that she had intended the hesitation to communicate.

Bert and Gilbert enacted incidents of true role distance behavior because of their dislike for the self they saw available to them in the role of writing solutions to mathematical problems on the blackboard. Both students had attitudes of minor role distance. Bert expressed his attitude by hesitating when the teacher asked him to go to the blackboard



to do a certain problem. Gilbert's expression of true role distance behavior was as he expressed it in answer to the question, "Did you do anything to let others know that you disliked doing the problem in mathematics on the blackboard?"

I said to my friend while going up to the board I don't like this.  
I mumbled that I couldn't do it.  
I tried to write so as no one could pick it out.

When the teacher asked Sheila to do a particular problem on the board, she expressed false role distance behavior by saying to Joyce, "Oh, my, why did he ask me to do this stuff?"<sup>3</sup> Crystal expressed false role distance behavior during the EP by not advancing to the lectern for a moment or two and by grimacing before she left her seat.

She wrote:

I made a face when I was asked to read my paper.

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<sup>3</sup>The findings of any type of role distance behavior among close friends in the classroom is contrary to the idea that role distance behavior is not possible where there are total interpersonal relationships. This idea was put forth in Julianne Ford, Douglas Young, and Steven Box, "Functional Autonomy, Role Distance, and Social Class," British Journal of Sociology, XVIII (1967), 370-381. Stebbins was more cautious than Ford and her associates. He said, "If taking role distance is impossible because of total interpersonal relationships, then this can only pertain to false role distance rather than to the true variety." Robert A. Stebbins, "Role Distance, Role Distance Behavior, and Jazz Musicians," British Journal of Sociology, forthcoming. The findings of this research suggest that both varieties of role distance behavior can occur where total interpersonal relationships exist. However, true role distance behavior seems to be the most prevalent type where such relationships exist.



During a formal interview, she said:

I enjoyed doing that (referring to the reading of her essay to the class) but I made out that I didn't want to go up in front of the class.

Allan employed similar tactics to express true role distance behavior during this period. He not only grimaced before he left his seat but he also "made faces" after he arrived at the lectern.

Lecturing and Seatwork.--Both unreciprocated role distance behavior and reciprocated role distance behavior were expressed during the lecturing and seatwork activities. Unreciprocated role distance behavior refers to incidents where a relatively simple relationship between an actor and a relevant audience exists. The individual enacting role distance behavior functions only as an actor while the relevant audience functions only as an audience (Figure 3). Most of the role distance behavior observed was of the unreciprocated type.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ten of the twelve incidents given in Appendix E are of the unreciprocated type.



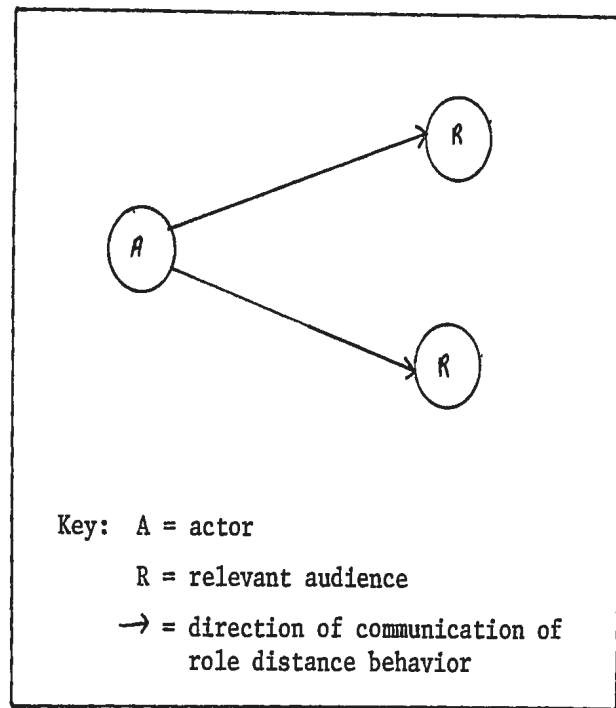


Figure 3: Unreciprocated Role Distance Behavior

An example of unreciprocated true role distance behavior representing minor role distance was seen when Crystal gave a sigh and mumbled during a study period. Her relevant audience included most of the potential audience. However, the members of the audience did nothing to communicate to her their dislike, if they had such an attitude, for the self which they saw available in the role expectations of the study period. At that moment Crystal was only an actor; she was not a relevant audience. Her relevant audience was only an audience to her while its members were not enacting role distance behavior toward her.

In reciprocated role distance behavior, the individuals concerned are simultaneously actors and relevant audiences (Figures 4 and 5). Figure 4 gives an example of reciprocated dyadic role distance behavior,



that is, only two actors and only two relevant audiences exist simultaneously.

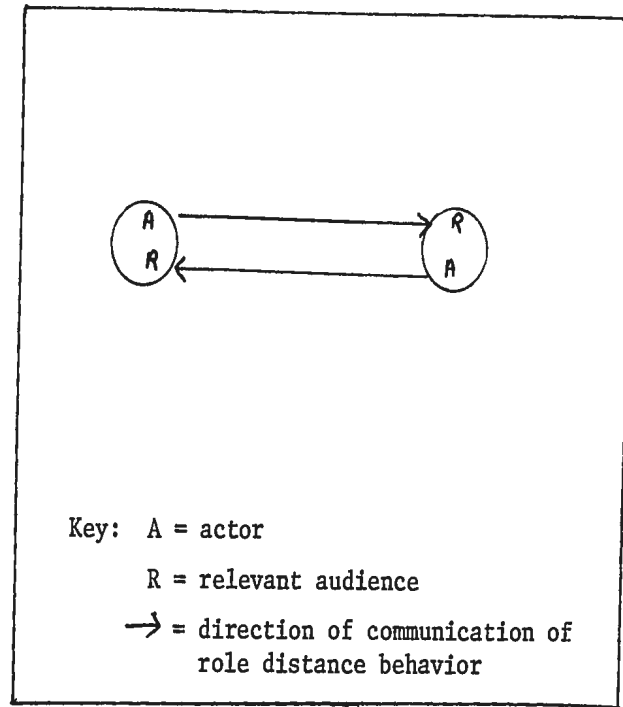


Figure 4: Reciprocated Dyadic Role Distance Behavior

Three varieties of reciprocated dyadic role distance behavior are theoretically possible. Both actors may be expressing true role distance behavior; or both actors may be expressing false role distance behavior; or one actor may be expressing true role distance behavior while the other is expressing false role distance behavior. The behavior enacted by both may represent minor or major role distance; or both minor and major role distance may be represented simultaneously. All of the reciprocated role distance behavior observed in the present study represented attitudes of minor role distance.



Lionel and Mike enacted reciprocated dyadic true role distance. Lionel expressed his role distance by making an unnecessary amount of noise while taking his books out of his desk to do the work that the teacher had assigned. He was expressing an attitude of dislike for the self available in the seatwork assignment. Mike was Lionel's relevant audience. Mike pretended that he did not hear what the teacher said concerning the work to be done during this period. He looked at Lionel and grinned, then looked at the teacher and asked, "Sir, what lesson are you going to teach today, or are you going to give us questions to do?" Lionel was Mike's relevant audience in this instance.

Both Mike and Lionel expected the other to respond in this way. It would have been degrading for both had either of them embraced the role expectations of the teacher. It was evident in their comments that each saw the other as his audience. Lionel wrote:

Mike doesn't enjoy school either. When  
he is here I don't care because I know  
I am not disturbing him . . . He expects  
me to do somethings. He also failed twice.  
Both of us are only waiting until we are  
old enough to get in the navy.

Mike said:

Yes, Sir, I expect Lionel to do things . . .  
He makes me do this . . . We do this stuff  
because we're friends.

Mike and Lionel played role distance behavior only to each other. Not one of the twelve students interviewed concerning the events between Mike and Lionel noticed what they had done except to say that they were "at something."

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<sup>5</sup>Number 8 in Appendix E is another example of reciprocal dyadic role distance behavior.



The interaction between Duncan and Mark demonstrates the existence of reciprocated dyadic true-false role distance behavior, that is, where one actor enacts false role distance and the other enacts true role distance behavior. Mark told Duncan that he wished the period was over because he could not do the work that he was suppose to do during the period. Duncan agreed with him and pretended that he could not do the work either. For Mark, this attitude was true role distance behavior, with Duncan as his audience. Mark felt that he had to express his dislike to Duncan because, in his own words, "If I didn't tell him he would make fun of me when he found out I couldn't do it." He feared the consequences of failing to express his dislike. Duncan's efforts to convince Mark that he could not really do the assigned work and that he disliked it were expressions of false role distance behavior. He said:

I did my work before I talked to Mark.  
He thought I was like him . . . that I  
didn't know it.

Because a student may have a multiplicity of possibly relevant audiences within the classroom, a multiplicity of types of reciprocated role distance behaviors may also be available. Starting with the simplest type, that is, the reciprocated dyadic one, it is possible to imagine a host of exceedingly intricate types involving many students in a maze of true and false role distance behavior representing both major and minor role distances. Three students was the largest number observed as being both actor and relevant audience at the same time (Figure 5).



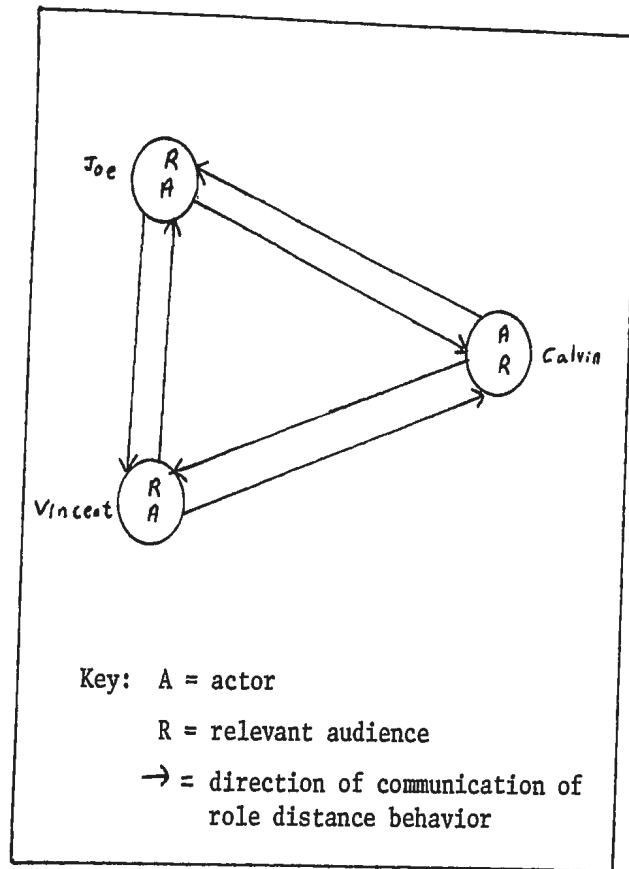


Figure 5: Reciprocated Triadic Role Distance Behavior

The three students involved in this reciprocated triadic role distance behavior were Joe, Vincent, and Calvin. All three expressed true role distance behavior which represented attitudes of minor role distance. Joe and Vincent disliked the self available to them in the role expectations that the English teacher held for them in the class periods by asking them to write paragraphs or short essays. They were playing true role distance behavior to each other and attempting to communicate this dislike to Calvin<sup>6</sup> by flicking paper back and forth to each other whenever they thought the teacher was not looking at them. Joe said, "We threw

<sup>6</sup>Calvin was only part of the relevant audience. Gerald and possibly others were also members of it.



paper because others were watching us." Calvin also disliked the idea of embracing the overall role expectations which the English teacher had for his students during this class period. He wanted Joe and Vincent to react positively to his behavior and he felt that the only way that he could be assured of this response was to express his dislike for the overall role expectations of the teacher. He accomplished this objective by closing his books and placing them on the corner of his desk. Vincent said to him, "You haven't got your work done, have you?" Calvin scornfully replied, "No, I am not doing that stuff." However, Calvin only kept his books closed for a moment or two and then he opened them again, began to do his seatwork, and glanced sideways at Joe and Vincent. He grinned at them whenever he caught their attention.

Joe, Vincent, and Calvin simultaneously were actors of true role distance behavior and relevant audiences for true role distance behavior. Joe and Vincent were actors and relevant audience to each other simultaneously. While Joe and Vincent were acting, Calvin comprised their relevant audience. Simultaneously, Calvin was acting and Joe and Vincent were members of his relevant audience. Table 3 shows the part of the relevant audience that each actor played in this reciprocated triadic true role distance behavior.



TABLE 3

ACTORS AND RELEVANT AUDIENCES SIMULTANEOUSLY INVOLVED IN  
THE RECIPROCATED TRIADIC ROLE DISTANCE BEHAVIOR  
ENACTED BY JOE, VINCENT, AND CALVIN

<u>Actors</u>	<u>Relevant Audiences</u>
1. Joe	Vincent Calvin
2. Vincent	Joe Calvin
3. Joe Vincent	Calvin
4. Calvin	Joe Vincent

#### Specific class activities

The three situations that require the attention of specific students to be discussed here are those in which the teacher has to put pressure on the students and more or less force them to carry out the overall role expectations,<sup>7</sup> those where the teacher inaccurately imputes a role to the student, and those where the present activities are affected by future roles.

Forced Activities.--When the teacher put pressure on Pat and forced him to carry out the overall role expectations that he held for his

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<sup>7</sup>Many of the students were forced to perform the overall role expectations in that their attendance at class was compulsory and they disliked going to school. The forced activities referred to here are those that the teacher repeatedly and forcefully had to tell the students to do within the classroom.



students, Pat developed minor role distance and enacted true role distance behavior. Several times during the class period Pat "turned around"<sup>8</sup> in his seat and talked to Daphne. Twice the teacher told him to "get to work," and each time he worked for a few moments and then talked to Daphne again. The third time the teacher shouted at him, "Pat!" Pat looked at the teacher in an innocent way that seemed to ask, "Why did you speak to me?" When the teacher turned away from him, Pat held up his fist and wrinkled his brow. Several of the students who were sitting close to Pat laughed at his behavior, which was the response for which he was "fishing." After this incident, he continued to scowl at the teacher as he proceeded with his seatwork. He carried out the role expectations of the teacher, that is, he refrained from turning around and talking to other students but he enacted true role distance behavior while doing so.<sup>9</sup>

Imputed Activities.--The teacher may, because of the lack of information, falsely accuse a student of performing certain forbidden activities. This phenomenon will be referred to as an imputed role. Two examples of imputed roles were observed, and in both cases the students unwillingly accepted the roles that the teacher imputed to them and each communicated dislike for these imputed roles by enacting true role distance behavior. An example of such behavior that was enacted as a result of the major role distance held by Doris toward the imputed roles of "dis-

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<sup>8</sup> A student is said to be "turned around" if he is facing one of the sides or the back of the room rather than the front of it.

<sup>9</sup> Example 7 in Appendix E is another incident of true role distance behavior that was enacted when a student was forced to carry out the overall role expectations.



obedient student" and "borrower"<sup>10</sup> was evident when several of the students were borrowing mathematical instruments from those who were sitting next to them. The teacher told them to stop borrowing these instruments. He said that, if they did not have their own, they would have to do without them. He reminded them that he had told them several times during the year to get their own instruments and that some were disobedient and did not follow his instructions. After noticing Doris talking to Minnie, the teacher falsely accused her of not having her own instruments. Doris said:

I got mad when he thought that I didn't have a maths. set which I did have . . . I didn't tell him about it because it was no good to . . . He might have admitted that he was wrong but I doubt it. I guess he would have got mad, anyhow.

Instead of telling the teacher that he was wrong, she reacted by looking him directly in the eyes, following him with her eyes for a couple of moments as he walked around the classroom. She said that she had "to do something" because she did not want to be called a "bum."<sup>11</sup>

Future Activities.--It often happens that students, because of their disturbing behavior or because they have not satisfactorily completed the work assigned to them, are kept in the classroom after the regular

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<sup>10</sup>Example 4 in Appendix E is another illustration of the taking of role distance behavior from an imputed role.

<sup>11</sup>In the classroom with Doris were two students who were occasionally called bums by some of the other students because they were "always borrowing" such items as pencils, paper, erasers, and rulers from the other students. Neither of the bums were observed enacting role distance behavior.



class periods are over.<sup>12</sup> The students are usually informed during the regular class period that they will have to "stay in after school." It is this requirement that is referred to here as future activities.

Boyd was observed enacting true role distance behavior as a result of being informed that he was to carry out this future role. He did not like the self available in the role of being forced to stay in the classroom after the regular class periods were over. He also realized that there would be only a few, if any, of the other students staying in with him. He correctly assumed that Arthur, Lionel, and Cyril did not expect him to accept this punishment "lying down." At first he attempted to persuade the teacher that he was behaving properly. He said, "I wasn't doing anything. We were only talking about our science questions." After he saw that his ingratiation tactic of self-presentation did not work, his attitude of major role distance led him to enact true role distance behavior.<sup>13</sup> He looked angry as he whispered to Arthur and Cyril, "I won't be staying long for him." He slumped back in his chair as he continued to do his seatwork. Later, while Boyd was "staying in," he said, "They make fun of you when you have to stay in and they don't have to."

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<sup>12</sup>Keeping a student in the classroom after the regular class periods are over for the day has been a widely accepted and used method of punishment both in urban and rural areas of the province. It is being used less now because more students are traveling on school buses.

<sup>13</sup>The self-presentation tactic of ingratiation involves "the explicit presentation or description of one's own attributes to increase the likelihood of being judged attractive." Edward E. Jones, Ingratiation: A Social Psychological Analysis (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), p. 40.



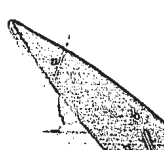
### The importance of an audience

It has been pointed out that for the actor there is a high probability that an audience is present before role distance behavior is enacted. Different students act differently when they discover that their assumptions concerning the presence of an audience are incorrect. Some discontinue enacting role distance behavior when they discover that an audience is not present while others try to attract an audience. If an actor assumes he has a relevant audience and if other preconditions of role distance behavior are met, it is role distance behavior that is enacted. However, when an actor finds out that his assumption is incorrect, that is, he doesn't have a relevant audience, it is not role distance behavior that he continues to enact. It should also be pointed out that the behavior enacted in an attempt to obtain an audience is not role distance behavior.

Clarence not only stopped playing false role distance behavior when he realized that he did not have a relevant audience but he immediately embraced the overall role expectations. He told me that during the one period a week that is set aside as a study period, he studies if there is no one watching him, but, if he sees that other students, especially Joan and Francis, are watching him, he "pretends to be daydreaming," or he "clears away the books on his desk." He said:

When I see that Joan and Francis are busy,  
I study then because they are not watching  
me . . . Someone is always saying something  
about how much I study. I try to let them  
know that I do not study that much.

Once, after he got a low mark in a history quiz, Joan said that he should have got a higher one because "he is always studying." It is remarks





such as this one that Clarence tried to prevent by playing role distance behavior.

When George discovered that he did not have an audience for the true role distance behavior that he enacted, he got Fred's attention by speaking to him and saying "watch this" before he continued to enact more role distance behavior.

Different reasons explain why a student tries to attract an audience when he discovers that he does not have one for the role distance behavior that he is enacting. Kevin thought that some students looked at him disparagingly because of a previous role he was forced to enact. After he secured an audience, he enacted true role distance behavior by moving from his own seat to another one that was vacant at the time. The teacher told him to get back to his seat. He (the teacher) continued:

What's wrong with you? Remember yesterday?  
You were trying to be big then. Now, get  
back to your seat and be quiet.

When asked what the teacher was referring to when he spoke about yesterday, Kevin said:

Yesterday some of us were throwing paper  
around the school during recess time. The  
teacher came into the class and he caught  
only me. So he made me pick it all up . . .  
The boys made fun of me because I was  
made pick the paper up.

It seems that Kevin was forced to perform behavior that was indeed threatening to his self-conception. He had an attitude of major role distance toward it and he wanted to regain his self-esteem, which could be accomplished only if he had a relevant audience. The noise he made when he moved his seat across the floor attracted the attention of a



relevant audience. The moving from his seat after he attracted the relevant audience was role distance behavior.

Mary wanted a relevant audience during the art class so that she could express minor role distance toward it in an attempt to counteract the unfavorable responses that she received during the other class periods for being a "curve raiser."<sup>14</sup> Except for the art period, she embraces the overall role expectations that the teachers hold for their students. She said:

I dislike this subject and I want others to know this. It makes me like everyone else. Some of them are more friendly to me when I do not beat them.<sup>15</sup>

Even if a student does not like the self he encounters in the role expectations of his social identity, he may not have or want a relevant audience within the classroom to whom he can communicate. Such may be the case when a student is an isolate in the group, especially if he does not make an effort to increase the strength of old interpersonal relationships or develop new ones within the group. Nellie is an example of such a student. Even though she disliked the self she was seeing as available to her in reading her essay in front of the class, she did not express this dislike because she did not have a relevant audience in the classroom. She tried to give the impression that she did not want to establish interpersonal relationships with any of the students in her class; they were not part of her reference group. She said:

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<sup>14</sup> Another incident of true role distance behavior that was enacted for a similar reason as this one is given in Example 9, Appendix E.

<sup>15</sup> One student is said to have beaten another student when he earned higher marks on an examination.



I don't have any friends in the class . . .  
 I don't associate with them. My friends  
 are in the seven class . . . I didn't  
 like reading in the class, Sir. Anyhow,  
 I hate this classroom.

### Psychological influences

The students who enacted role distance behavior can be divided into three categories with respect to their interpretations of their relationships with the rest of the students in the class. They are: (1) those who see themselves as being well integrated into the classroom group, (2) those who see themselves as being isolates in the group, and (3) those who are uncertain as to their relationships with the rest of the students in the group.<sup>16</sup> This interpretation is influenced by and influences the actor's state of relative tension in his relationships to the group; in fact, it is not only an intricate part of one's feeling of acceptance or rejection from the group but it in turn influences the actor's relationship to this group. It plays an important part, therefore, in the decision to enact or not to enact role distance behavior.

Some students fluctuated from one category to another depending upon the events in and outside of the classroom prior to the interviewing. The category in which one sees himself is also determined by the degree of success that he has had in using other strategies and techniques in an attempt to preserve his self-image.

It was found that the students in all three categories of this subjective interpretation of group relationships enacted role distance

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<sup>16</sup>The students were placed into one of these categories only after all of the information from each student was analyzed.



behavior. However, there were two distinguishing factors. Firstly, when a student saw himself as being well integrated into or isolated from the rest of the class, he did not try to attract an audience for the role distance behavior that he was enacting, that is, when he found that his assumptions were incorrect and he realized that he did not have a relevant audience.<sup>17</sup> This behavior was in contrast to the reaction of the students when they were uncertain about their relationship with the rest of the group. They tried to obtain a relevant audience if they did not have one when they wanted to enact role distance behavior.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, when students were uncertain about their relationship to the rest of the students in their class, they had greater fear, concerning the consequences of the enactment of the overall role expectations which they disliked or which they feared would show them in an unfavorable light, than when they were in one of the other two categories.<sup>19</sup>

#### Situational Expressions

Several factors influence the situational expressions of role distance behavior. The following have been isolated as the most important

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<sup>17</sup> Clarence is an example of a person who saw himself as being well integrated. He did not try to attract an audience but he enacted role distance behavior when an audience was present (see page 57). Nellie, at all times, saw herself as an isolate. She did not try to find an audience for the behavior that she enacted (see pages 59 and 60).

<sup>18</sup> Llewellyn, who at one time was uncertain of his relationship to the rest of the group, tried to obtain a relevant audience before he enacted role distance behavior (see Example 11, Appendix E).

<sup>19</sup> See the incident of role distance behavior that Kevin enacted as described on page 58.



ones affecting the situational expressions of the incidents of role distance behavior reported in this study.

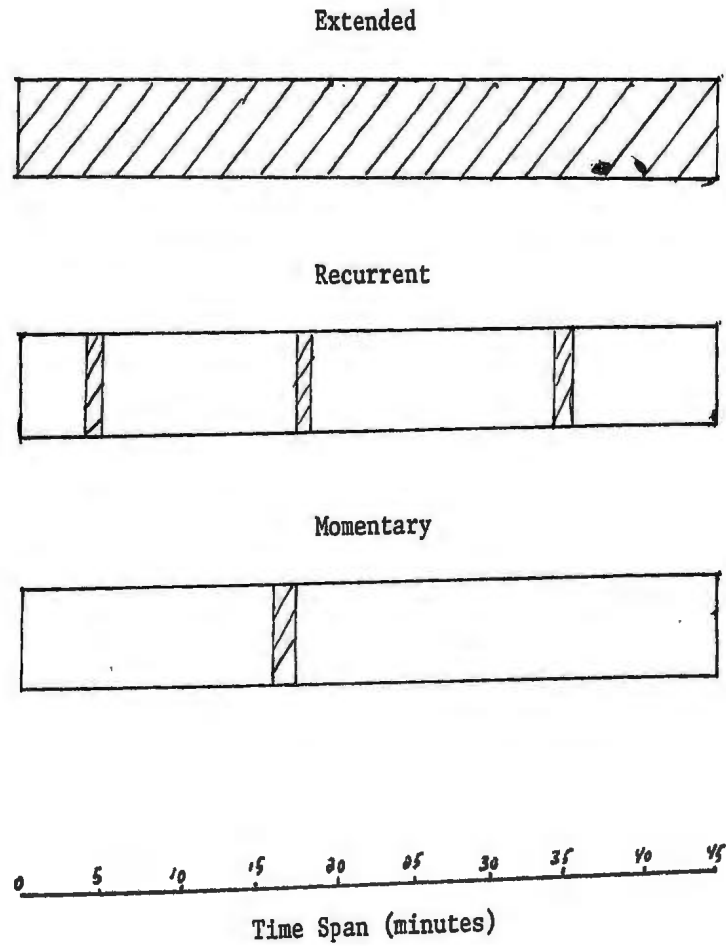
1. The physical distance between the actor and his relevant audience.
2. The response of the relevant audience.
3. The actor's feeling with regard to his relationship with the student in the classroom.
4. The perceived effects of not convincing the relevant audience of one's role distance.
5. The length of time that the actor assumes it takes to convince the relevant audience of the desired intention.

These factors not only affect situational expressions of role distance behavior but they are affected by previous expressions. The situational expressions will be divided into three groupings--momentary, recurrent, and extended. These three groupings are diagrammatically shown in Figure 6.

#### Momentary expressions

Momentary expressions occur where role distance is communicated by one incident of behavior which at the most extends for a minute or two (see Figure 6). It may incorporate a combination of behavioral expressions, for example, vocal and body behaviors. The false role distance behavior enacted by Joan during the EP is an illustration of this point. She simultaneously sighed and slumped back in her chair to communicate dislike for the self that she saw in the role of presenting her essay





Key: time involved in enactment of role distance behavior

Figure 6: Situational Expressions of Role Distance Behavior



to the class, while in actuality she liked the self that she saw in the role expectations.

### Recurrent expression

The recurrent expression of role distance behavior takes place when the performance of the overall role expectations is interspersed with two or more momentary expressions of role distance behavior that represent the same attitude of role distance (see Figure 6). The time span between the momentary expressions varies depending upon the circumstances at the instance of the expression.

One example of the recurrent expression of true role distance behavior was enacted by Crystal during a study period. The overall role expectations for a study period is for everyone to become engrossed in whatever subject appeals to him. It could be reading or some unfinished written work. Crystal did not like these expectations and she felt that "only a few likes this period." She did not want to give the impression that she liked the self that she saw available to her in the role expectations of this period, yet she felt obliged "to do something."<sup>20</sup> At the beginning of the period, she gave a couple of sighs and "told everyone" that she was "bored with studying." She then appeared to embrace the role for about twenty minutes, after which she rose and left the room. On her way out, she stopped at Ruby's desk and whispered to her that she was leaving "to pass away some time." She was gone for a few minutes. When she came back, she embraced the role for about

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<sup>20</sup> By "something," she meant to do what the teacher expected of her, that is, to carry out the overall role expectations.



fifteen minutes, after which her reading was interspersed with statements to Wesley and Cynthia.<sup>21</sup>

Four or five momentary expressions of role distance behavior all may represent the same role distance. For example, George enacted four incidents of momentary true role distance behavior in his attempt to express his dislike for the self that he saw available to him in the role of presenting his essay to the class. In answer to the question, "Did you do anything to let others know that you disliked giving the paper?" he wrote:

The way I got up.  
I laughed when I got there [to the lectern].  
I talked in a low voice.  
I made faces for the other students to see  
when the teacher wasn't watching me.

The interviewing confirmed that these incidents of behavior were true role distance behavior. The speaking in a low voice was only momentary because he obeyed the teacher when he told him to "speak up."

#### Extended expression

Extended expression of role distance behavior occurs where the actor is simultaneously enacting role distance behavior and fulfilling the overall role expectations for an extended period of time. Since in all expressions of role distance behavior the actor is simultaneously enacting the overall role expectations, it is the extended period of time that makes this expression different from the other two groupings (Figure 6). Interruptions in the extended expressions may occur, but

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<sup>21</sup>Example 3 in Appendix E is an instance of recurrent expression of false role distance behavior.



they last for only a short period of time in comparison to the intervals between the instances of role distance behavior in the recurrent expressions.


Helen's act of hurrying through the reading of her essay to the class and her continuous "impatient look" are examples of extended expression of false role distance behavior. She liked the self that she saw available to her in the role of reading to the class, but she feared the teasing she thought she would get from the other students if she embraced the role to the extent that she wished. She wrote:

I like reading to the class because it helps improve my speaking. I had a impatient look on my face all while I was reading my essay. I felt that I had to keep it there to convince my classmates that I really disliked reading my essay. Some of them tease me when I do things better than they do it.

In all three groupings of situational expressions of role distance behavior (momentary, recurrent, and extended), the overall role expectations are the "main involvement" and role distance behavior is the "side involvement."<sup>22</sup> When role distance behavior threatens the fulfillment of the overall role expectations, that is, when the side involvement jeopardizes the main involvement, it is no longer role distance behavior.

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<sup>22</sup>"A main involvement is one that absorbs the major part of an individual's attention and his interests, visibly forming the principal current determinant of his actions. A side involvement is an activity that an individual can carry on in an abstract fashion without threatening or confusing simultaneous maintenance of a main involvement." Erving Goffman, Behavior in Public Places (New York: Free Press, 1963), p. 43.





### Dimensions

In our discussion of the circumstances in the classroom situation under which major and minor role distance, and true and false role distance behavior occurs, it was explicitly implied that there are differences in the development of both role distance and role distance behavior according to the classroom activities that are taking place. In addition to the difference between individual activities and group activities, this section will look at development of true and false role distance behavior along the lines of disorderly behavior, academic performance, and popularity ranking.<sup>23</sup>

Most of the incidents of true role distance behavior that were enacted during the lecturing and seatwork activities seem to be enacted because of a dislike for school in general. Those incidents enacted during the performance of student activities and specific class activities were, for the most part, the results of a dislike for specific subjects or specific happenings in the classroom rather than a dislike toward school in general. It often occurs that an attitude of dislike for the self available in some role expectations remains dormant and results in role distance behavior only if activated by an individual other than the actor or his relevant audience. For example, in the activities that require the attention of specific students, it was the teachers' actions that

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<sup>23</sup> It is important to reiterate that, since we have not made claims about the frequency of the role distance and role distance behavior in the population of junior high school students, this discussion concerning the dimensions along which role distance behavior develops is, at the most, only suggestive. Research problems concerning these and other dimensions will be discussed in the section on Future Research in Chapter V.



instigated the role distance behavior enacted by the students. It is possible and probable that, if the teacher had acted differently, the role distance behavior would not have been enacted. While the actions of the teacher alone cannot produce role distance in the students, they can be instrumental in illuminating the presence of the preconditions of both true and false role distance behavior.

Only one of the six students whom the teachers classified as their "best students"<sup>24</sup> expressed true role distance behavior. All six of the "worst students"<sup>25</sup> enacted true role distance behavior during the observational period. The three best students who enacted false role distance behavior tried to hide this behavior from the teacher, whereas many of those enacting true role distance behavior did not concern themselves with hiding their behavior. This fact is especially true of the true role distance behavior that was enacted during the forced, imputed, and future activities. Thus true role distance behavior often became disorderly behavior which attracted the attention of the teacher. The ingenuity, however, in giving off cues and the subtleness used in the expression of role distance behavior of both varieties, as well as the timing of the expressions, mean that much of the role distance behavior is not disorderly behavior. Many of the incidents went unnoticed by

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<sup>24</sup>By "best students," the teachers meant the ones they considered to be well behaved. Those six students were also the ones who got the highest average marks on their mid-term examinations, which poses the interesting question of how the teachers define the situation with regard to specific students.

<sup>25</sup>The "worst students" were those whom the teachers believed caused the most disturbing behavior in the class. They were also the least obedient. Incidentally, three of the worst students got low average marks on their mid-term examinations.



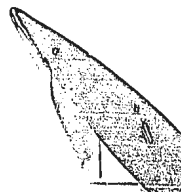
the teachers and without a doubt some escaped the attention of the researcher.

Eight of the twelve students who ranked the highest in popularity on the sociometric test<sup>26</sup> enacted role distance behavior of at least one variety. Only three of the twelve who ranked the lowest on this test enacted true role distance behavior.

To recapitulate, role distance behavior of both varieties develops in relation to the presence of both individual activities and group activities, but it seems to be more prevalent in the former. Those who have either a poor academic performance or a high degree of popularity in the classroom are more prone to enact true role distance behavior in the classroom than those who have a good academic performance or a low degree of popularity in the classroom. During certain circumstances role distance behavior will be defined by the teachers as disorderly behavior, while under other circumstances it will be enacted unnoticed to everyone except the actor's relevant audience.

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<sup>26</sup>The sociometric test used is given in Appendix D. The category demonstrating the degree of popularity of a student as measured by this test is different from the three categories in which the students were divided with respect to their interpretations of their relationships to the rest of the students in the classroom (see page 60). This sociometric test purports to measure the degree of popularity of a student as it is seen by other students in the class. Whereas the decision to place a student in one of the three categories of integrated, isolated, or uncertain was made from the information gained from that student as to where he saw himself in relation to the rest of the class. The most popular student as denoted by the sociometric test did not always see himself as being well integrated.





## CHAPTER IV

### THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF ROLE DISTANCE BEHAVIOR AMONG CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

In order to show the distinctiveness of both varieties of role distance behavior among closely related forms of behavior enacted by junior high school students in the classroom situation, this chapter will concentrate on incidents of behavior that meet most, but not all, of the preconditions of role distance behavior and show how each is similarly related to, and yet different from, true and false role distance behavior. In sorting out the plethora of behaviors enacted by students in the classroom, a typology with five categories was developed.

1. True role distance behavior.
2. False role distance behavior.
3. Behavior of which the student is unaware.
4. Behavior of which the student is aware but does not know  
his reasons for enacting it.
5. Other behavior.--Some but not all of the preconditions of  
either variety of role distance behavior are met by  
each of the incidents of behavior in this category.

It is realized that the amount of detailed behavior remembered by any one student is related to at least two factors: (1) the length of



time between the enactment of the behavior and the interview concerning it and (2) the importance of the behavior to the actor. Since all of the interviewing took place within a relatively short period of time after the behavior was enacted,<sup>1</sup> and since role distance behavior, even that representing minor role distance, is of considerable importance to the actor, the investigator felt justified in classifying the behavior that the actor could not recall during the interview as behavior of which the student was unaware. By definition, this type of behavior is not role distance behavior. Gilbert, after he had seen the list of incidents of his observed behavior, voiced the sentiments of others who were unaware of certain observed incidents of their own behavior. He said:

Sir, I don't know if I have done all this  
you've said I have done. I cannot remember  
all these things--I don't know--but I don't  
think I did all that . . . I believe I did  
play with the ruler . . .

Some of the attitudes which the students held could not be classified as attitudes of liking or of disliking for the overall role expectations. They often held either neutral or ambivalent feelings toward these expectations. As a result of these neutral and ambivalent attitudes, various reasons were given for enacting the incidents of behavior that were observed:

I don't know.  
For something to do.  
To have fun.

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<sup>1</sup>While seven hours was the maximum time span between the enactment of the behavior and the interview concerning it, most of the interviewing was done within two or three hours of the enacted behavior. Some of it was done within an hour after the enactment of the behavior.



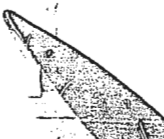
I don't know, to pass the time, I guess.  
 Because others were playing around to.  
 No reason, I just did it.  
 Because I was bored.  
 I am tired with work.

### Related Phenomena

The behaviors in which most, but not all, of the preconditions of either variety of role distance behavior were met will be placed in one of five categories: (1) role abandonment, (2) fear of inadequate performance, (3) dislike for the teacher, (4) attempting to attract a relevant audience, and (5) student frolic. The empirical boundaries of role distance behavior will become clearer as the behavior in each one of these categories is illustrated and analyzed in relation to the preconditions of at least one of the varieties of role distance behavior.

### Role abandonment

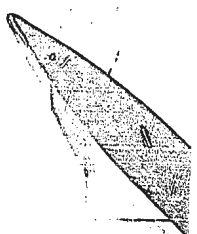
There are two types of role abandonment. One is when the student performs only the preliminaries to the role expectations. He accepts the social identity by attending classes, but he does not embrace the role. For example, he refuses to listen attentively, to take notes, or to do any of the work expected of him. Only an occasional student acts in this way and then only on rare occasions. Such behavior is uncommon among junior high school students. The most frequent type of role abandonment behavior is when the student performs part of the overall role expectations and then abandons the role only to return to it on his own accord or after he has been observed by the teacher. The enactment of behavior that is extraneous to the performance of the overall role expectations often prevents the student from satisfactorily performing these expectations.





Bill refused to perform the role of reading his essay to the class. When the teacher told him to go to the lectern to read his essay, he refused to do so. Bill was told that he would have "to stay in after school" as well as write another essay if he did not read this one to the class. The teacher compromised and said that he could stay in his seat to read it. Despite the threat of punishment, Bill did not comply to the first request by the teacher nor to his compromised position. Four of the preconditions of true role distance behavior were present in Bill's refusal to perform the overall role expectations: (1) he disliked the role expectations, (2) he had a relevant audience, (3) he feared losing respect and support for his self-image if the audience was not aware of his dislike for the role expectations, and (4) he had a desire to communicate this dislike. Bill's behavior was not true role distance behavior because two of its preconditions were not present: (1) he did not feel compelled to enact the overall role expectations and (2) they were not satisfactorily enacted.

Sam seemed to be embracing the overall role expectations held for him during most of a geography lecture. He abandoned the role performance, however, when the teacher refused to allow him to leave the classroom in order to get a drink at the fountain which was located in the corridor. The teacher said to him, "There is no need to leave the room now. We only have ten minutes before lunch time." Instead of continuing to listen, to take notes and to participate in the class discussion as he was doing prior to his request to leave the room, Sam put his notebook in his desk, slumped back in his seat, and played with his pencil. The behavior enacted by Sam was role abandonment rather than role distance behavior because the overall role expectations were not satisfactorily enacted.





At least one difference between role abandonment and momentary diversion from the role performance is evident. The role distance behaviors exhibited by momentary and recurrent expressions may, and often do, represent momentary diversions from the role performance (see Figure 6). Fred's leaving the room first appeared to be role abandonment, but upon further investigation it was found that all the preconditions for true role distance behavior were present.<sup>2</sup>

Role abandonment may be accompanied by an emotional expression. The following behavior enacted by Joe is an example. Joe had been moving back and forth between his seat and Shirley's. According to him, they were doing their mathematics together. A couple of times Joe was heard giggling while he was at Shirley's seat. The teacher looked at him and with a loud voice said, "Sit down in your seat and stay sitting down there." Joe sat down immediately, but he put an innocent look on his face and pretended to be surprised. He mumbled to himself and frequently looked toward the teacher who was walking around the classroom looking at the work that the students were doing. Joe did not engage in any more seatwork during the remainder of the fifteen to twenty minutes that was left in the period. During an informal interview Joe said angrily:

He made me sit down. Honest, Sir,  
we were only doing our mathematics.  
He makes me mad he do.

When asked:

Why didn't you do your mathematics on  
your own, that is, after you were made  
to sit down?

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<sup>2</sup>This incident of true role distance behavior is given in Example 10, Appendix E.



Joe replied:

When I forced to do something for nothing  
I don't like it and I let him know that  
. . . and other too.

### Fear of inadequate performances

Several students used unusually low voices when they were answering questions which the teacher directed to them. The reason is that they were afraid their answers were wrong. They feared the consequences of an incorrect answer, not so much from the teacher but from their fellow students. Mark, one of the students who spoke in a low voice when asked a question by the teacher, during a formal interview, said:

Unless I am sure of the answer I am afraid to speak out. Sometimes the boys laugh at the wrong answers . . . Yes, Sir, I feel bad when the boys laugh at me. It makes you feel like you shouldn't have answer.

On another occasion, this same student was observed answering questions in a loud and clear voice even when the questions were directed to the class in general and not specifically to him.

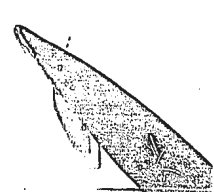
In answer to the question:

Why didn't you speak louder when the teacher asked you to explain how pulleys work?

Dulice replied:

I don't understand how pulleys work.  
I guessed at the answer.

In both of the above instances, the low voice was used in an attempt to preserve their self-conceptions but the behavior that they enacted was not role distance behavior. They were not trying to communicate a dis-



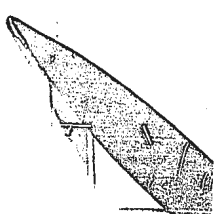


like for all or part of the overall role expectations; instead they were attempting to escape the role performance because of a fear of being unable to perform in a manner that would bring positive responses from their relevant audiences, which is behavior that results from a fear of failure. Moreover, this behavior fails to qualify as role distance on other grounds; that is, neither one of the students satisfactorily performed the specific aspects of the overall role expectations in that they did not adequately answer the questions which they were asked.

Without a doubt the determining factor was the fear of a response from the audience similar to the one that Calvin experienced when he gave a wrong answer to two questions that the teacher had asked him on material that he was supposed to have studied. The audience did not noticeably react to Calvin's wrong answer to the first question, but when he responded incorrectly to the second question, which was asked only a few moments after the first one, several of the students giggled. Joe looked at Calvin and said, "That simple boy!" Allan immediately intruded, "He's stupid." Calvin stared at Allan for a moment or two when he noticed that the teacher was not watching him, held up his fist to Allan, and pointed to the door. Calvin resented being called stupid. During a formal interview, he said:

I am not stupid. It's none of his  
[Allan's] business if I am . . .  
I'd prove to him that I am not  
stupid if he was outdoors.

Joan did not speak in a low voice, that is, in a voice any lower than she ordinarily uses, when she guessed at the answer to a specific question from the teacher. She did, however, react resentfully when she

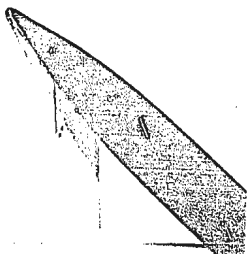




learned that her answer was wrong. The teacher asked her, "From what language does most of the vocabulary in music come?" She shook her shoulders and put her head down. After a moment she answered, "French, Sir." The teacher informed her that she was wrong and added, "You are a music student; you should have known." Joan put her elbows on her desk and rested her head in her hand. When asked about how she felt about her wrong response, she said, "Miserable, Sir." She also said that she "didn't really think French was the answer," but she figured it was better to guess at it than not to answer at all. The behavior that Joan enacted after responding with the wrong answer was enacted to a teacher-pupil audience. It was not enacted because of an attitude of role distance but rather it was a reaction to her inadequate role performance. She was disgusted with herself because she thought that she should have known the answer. In other words, her reaction was an emotional expression communicating her displeasure with her unsatisfactory performance of the overall role expectations.

#### Dislike for the teacher

Some students find it degrading to perform the overall role expectations when certain teachers are in the classroom. This reaction is brought on not so much by dislike for these overall role expectations as by dislike for the teacher. Even though the dislike may be consciously communicated because of a fear of losing respect and hence the loss of support for one's self-image, it is not true role distance behavior since the dislike is for the person who holds the overall role expectations rather than for the overall expectations themselves. Even if a person





tries to communicate that he dislikes the teacher because of a fear of degrading remarks from a relevant audience, that is, if he tries to give a false impression in order to protect his self-image, it is not false role distance behavior for the same reason that it cannot be true role distance behavior. It is a dislike for a person and not for the self that an actor sees available to him in the role performance.

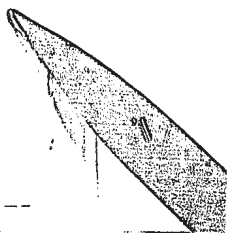
The examples of behaviors enacted by Tom and Bill illustrate performances enacted because of a dislike for the teachers concerned. Tom moved around in his seat a great deal more when Mr. Northcott was in the classroom than he did when other teachers were present. During the last few moments of a period in which the students had seatwork to do, Tom made a disturbing noise when he took the books on the floor by his seat and placed them on his desk. Mr. Northcott spoke to him in a stern voice and warned that he would be reprimanded if he did not "stop acting up." He said:

What's wrong with you? You are always doing something.

Tom's lips formed a pout as his head dropped. During a formal interview, Tom said: -

I always dislike his period . . . I finished my work before I made any noise . . . I can't stand Mr. Northcott . . . He's always picking on me because he doesn't like me.

Bill's dislike for Mr. Black was clearly shown by his behavior when Mr. Black was in the classroom. His answers to the questionnaire verified this attitude of dislike. During one period when Mr. Black was in the classroom, Bill was observed mumbling to himself, making noises with his





pencil, and clicking his feet on the floor. In answer to the question,

"Why did you enact these incidents of behavior?" Bill wrote:

To bug the teacher sir. He gets mad at me and won't even let me leave the room or sharpen my pencil. He lets everyone else leave the room.

### Attracting an audience

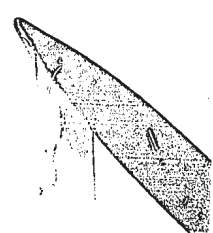
Students often attempt to arouse the attention of a pupil-audience, a teacher-audience, or a teacher-pupil-audience. Remarks from different teachers indicate that for some students this practice is very noticeable.

Jane is always bringing me newspaper clippings. She does not seem that interested but she likes to be recognized.

Joe asks foolish questions. He knows the difference. He just likes to get everyone's attention.

Gerald cannot keep still . . . It is very disturbing. The class can't work when there is noise. It's even annoying to the teacher.

These students were looking for attention and not necessarily attempting to communicate role distance. We have already seen that the behavior enacted to attract the attention of a relevant audience is not role distance behavior. Even if one is desirous of communicating an attitude of dislike in order to preserve one's self-esteem, role distance behavior is not enacted until the relevant audience is present, or is at least assumed to be present by the actor. The behavior that is required to secure the attention of a relevant audience so that one may communicate an attitude of role distance is indeed closely related to role distance behavior. With the exception of the precondition which states that there is a high subjective probability that a relevant audience is present, this behavior



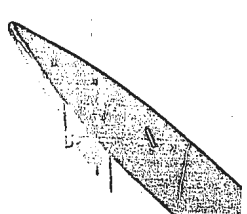


may have all of the preconditions of either true or false role distance behavior. George enacted an example of this type of behavior when he secured Fred's attention by telling him to "watch this" before he enacted true role distance behavior.

### Student frolic

These activities are those in which the students engage "for the fun of it" or "for something to do," especially when they become bored with having to perform the overall role expectations. Most, if not all, of the students become involved in this type of activity at some time or other, which might involve individual activities such as teasing someone. For example, when Gerard was asked why he was talking to Olive, he said that he was "pestering her." During the first five minutes of a particular class period, Junior asked three times if he could sharpen his pencil. It did not need sharpening, but he did not feel like working. He sharpened it "for something to do." Often there are groups of students in different sections of the classroom who are involved in different types of frolic-like behavior. Different students from all areas of the classroom may be involved, and occasionally the entire class becomes part of such activity.

The precondition of true and false role distance behavior that is most likely to be apparent in the frolicsomeness of the students is the presence of a relevant audience. Even this precondition is not always present because the behavior that students enact in order to attract the attention of a relevant audience may be playful behavior. Student frolic seems to have fewer of the preconditions of either true or false role distance behavior than any of the other categories discussed in this chapter.





Having demonstrated the presence of both true and false role distance behavior within the classroom and its distinctiveness among other similar behaviors enacted in this situation, our next chapter will contain a discussion of the theoretical implications of the findings, together with a summary of both the theory and the findings.



## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In Chapter I, it was stated that role distance, as an area of scholarly interest, is long on theoretical developments and short on empirical research. In this chapter the findings of the present study will be examined for their relationship to the theory of role distance and their implications for future research. A summary of the theory, methodology, and significant findings will follow. We shall conclude with suggestions for future research.

#### Theoretical Implications

Our four research problems will serve as a guide for the following discussion of the theoretical implications of the findings: (1) the circumstances in the classroom teaching situation under which both major and minor role distance occur, (2) the situational expressions of both true and false role distance behavior, (3) the dimensions along which role distance behavior develops among students, and (4) the distinctiveness of both varieties of role distance behavior among behavior patterns of students in the classroom. In addition to clearly demonstrating the empirical viability of role distance theory, several conceptual categories have emerged from the data collected. Thus, by discovering new dimensions



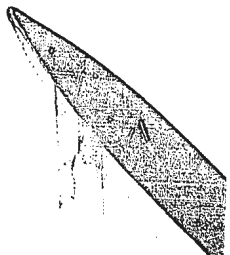
and making new conceptual distinctions, we have taken a step toward the enrichment of existing theory.<sup>1</sup>

One significant finding is that role distance seems to occur during both specific and general class activities. An actor develops role distance not only toward the behavior expected of him as occupant of a particular social identity, but he may develop it toward the activities that have been falsely imputed to him by his superordinates. These false acquisitions are often the result of the teacher's lack of information, or at least by his failing to take into account adequate information, about the attitudes of students when he is defining the situation. Role distances may also develop toward the activities associated with a future role that a student will have to perform because of his failure to perform his present role expectations adequately. In other words, role distance behavior may be the resultant behavior of the teacher's attempt to punish a student for his inadequate performance of the overall role expectations.

The nine-to-one ratio of minor role distance over major role distance leads one to speculate about the reasons for the prominence of the former among junior high school students in the classroom situation. The students have been together for a relatively long period of time. All of them have been in the same classroom for the entire academic year and some had been classmates the previous academic year. At some point or other during

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<sup>1</sup>"In discovering theory one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept." Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), p. 23. It is also worthwhile noting that, since we have discovered theory from data, we have generated what Glaser and Strauss, in this same book, have referred to as "grounded theory," p. 1, et passim.

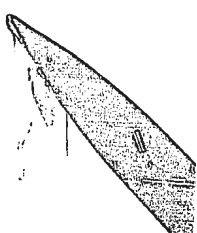




this extended period of association most, if not all, of the students have had to perform behavior that they considered degrading to their self-conceptions. Since almost everyone has had and continues to have humiliating experiences while carrying out certain overall role expectations, no one in the relevant audience is likely to respond to that behavior in a way that will indicate a loss of self-esteem for the actor. The members of the relevant audience know that sooner or later they will have to perform behavior that they consider degrading and that how they respond while part of the relevant audience will tend to be reciprocated under these circumstances.

Under certain conditions, depending on how he views his relationship with the rest of the students in the classroom, the actor may enact behavior to attract a relevant audience so that he will be able to communicate his attitude of role distance to this audience. It is when a person is uncertain about his relationship to the rest of the students in the classroom that he enacts behavior to obtain the attention of a relevant audience for his role distance behavior. This fact suggests that there is a possibility that role distance behavior is enacted more often when the actor is uncertain about his relationship to his audience than when he feels either that he is integrated into it or that he is isolated from it altogether. This proposition is worthy of further study.

The situational expressions of role distance behavior have been categorized into momentary, recurrent, and extended expressions. Most of the incidents of role distance behavior reported in this study were expressed in either a momentary or recurrent manner. Some students did, however, find that extended expressions were required to communicate their





attitudes of dislike. More study is needed on these manifestations of role distance. Theoretical "saturation" may not have been reached for either of these categories.<sup>2</sup>

The results suggest that the development of true role distance behavior varies with the kind of classroom activities that are taking place, as well as with the nature of academic performance and popularity ranking of the students. Further study is needed either to confirm or deny these hypotheses.

Even though role distance behavior is distinctive among other forms of classroom behavior, it is only one genre of behavior enacted by junior high school students to communicate dislike for the overall role expectations and to protect their self-conceptions. That is to say, one can protect his self-conception by other means. Role distance can be expressed in behavior that does not meet all of the preconditions of role distance behavior. For example, role abandonment, like role distance behavior, may be a result of "an attitude of dislike toward all or part of a set of role expectations which, when enacted, bring the threat of a loss of respect and at least momentary lack of support for one's self-conception from certain reference others present in the situation."<sup>3</sup>

The fact that many students answered both yes and no to questions concerning the attraction of particular periods and specific classroom

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<sup>2</sup>"Saturation means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category." Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>3</sup>Robert A. Stebbins, "Role Distance, Role Distance Behavior and Jazz Musicians," British Journal of Sociology, forthcoming.



activities, together with the fact that many were not sure why they behaved as they did, has implications for the investigation of role distance and role distance behavior. Ambivalence toward role expectations presents special technical problems in the determination of the presence of role distance as does the inability to account for behavior just enacted.

### Summary

Our final task will be to summarize the theory on which this study is based, the objectives of the research, the procedures, and the findings and conclusions.

#### A summary of the theory and research problems

The theoretical background was drawn from two areas: (1) the social psychology of role distance and role distance behavior, and (2) the sociology of behavior in the classroom.

Role distance is an attitude of dislike which one develops toward the enactment of all or part of the behavior required of the social identity he occupies. It is believed that the enactment of all or part of these overall role expectations will "bring the threat of a loss of respect and at least momentary lack of support for one's self-conception from certain reference others present in the situation."<sup>4</sup> It is this notion of reference others present or relevant audience that is all important to whether or not one's interpretation of the enactment of the overall role expectations is detrimental to his self-conception. If the enactment is seen as significantly threatening to one's self-conception, it is major role distance. Minor role distance arises when the enactment

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

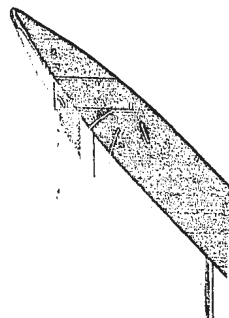


of the interpreted overall role expectations is seen as only mildly threatening.

Role distance behavior is consciously enacted to communicate an attitude of role distance to a relevant audience. In an attempt to preserve one's self-esteem, one may enact either true or false role distance behavior. The former is an expression of a genuine role distance (major or minor), whereas the latter is fraudulent behavior. In false role distance behavior there is an attempt to show dislike for the self available in a particular role, whereas, in fact, the actual attitude toward this self is one of liking.

Research in the field of educational psychology has clearly demonstrated that different expressions of behavior are associated with each of the two basic teaching styles of the authoritarian-democratic division. Despite the variations in teacher-pupil relationships along social class lines and the different role expectations that different teachers have for students of the same social stratum, it has been pointed out that a considerable amount of consensus exists amongst teachers concerning their overall role expectations for their students. These independent variables in the expression of student behavior in the classroom, however, tended to be peripheral to our main concern; role distance.

It has been shown that the classroom teaching situation constitutes a relatively unique type of social situation. The ideal circumstance of having all the students with the one principal action orientation of learning and the teacher with that of teaching is seldom present in the classroom at any one time. These characteristics, together with the fact that both the teacher and student often have inadequate information



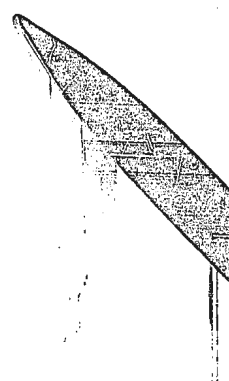


information concerning each other's action orientations and self-conceptions, combine to make the classroom an especially appropriate area for the study of role distance and role distance behavior.

Since the body of ideas on role distance and role distance behavior presented in Chapter I has never been systematically tested, the first aim of this study was to attempt to demonstrate that what had been theorized does, in fact, take place in everyday life. The study concentrated on the following problems: (1) the circumstances in the classroom teaching situation under which both major and minor role distance occur, (2) the situational expressions of both true and false role distance behavior, (3) the dimensions along which role distance develops among students, and (4) the distinctiveness of role distance behavior of both varieties among the expressions of behavior of students in the classroom.

#### A summary of the procedures

Two grade eight classrooms with a total of seventy-five students were selected as the setting for the study. Having isolated the specific problems to be investigated, the purpose of this exploratory research was presented. The concepts of true and false role distance behavior, and major and minor role distance, were operationalized. Examples of potential role distance behavior were listed as a guide to gathering data. The data-gathering techniques used were observation, questionnaires, and formal and informal interviews. The questionnaires solicited information concerning the role distance and other attitudes of the students and a list of specific incidents of behavior enacted in an attempt to communicate these attitudes or to give a false impression of them. A portion of the questions in the formal interviews were standardized.



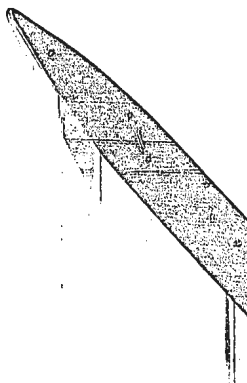


These items were used as a guide to compare the behavior observed with that which the students reported enacting and to learn the reasons why each incident of behavior was enacted. The informal interviews had three functions: (1) to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of rapport with the students, (2) to augment the information obtained by the semi-structured formal interviews, and (3) to increase the validity of the information used in making decisions about what attitudes were role distance and which incidents of behavior were role distance behavior.

#### A summary of the findings and conclusions

The empirical viability of role distance theory has been clearly demonstrated; moreover, hidden dimensions were discovered and new conceptual distinctions made. Minor role distance was found to be more prevalent than major role distance. In fact, only four of the thirty-four incidents of true role distance behavior represented major role distance.

The attitudes of role distance that were instrumental in the enactment of role distance behavior were a result of the students' versions to the selves available in the performance of expected behavior in the following situations: (1) the general role of student, for example, during seat-work and lecturing; (2) specific aspects of the student's role, for example, during the EP, reading poetry to the class, and doing mathematical problems on the board; (3) forced activities, as when the teacher applied pressure to the students in order to make them carry out the overall role expectations; (4) imputed activities, that is, in the performance of roles that the teacher falsely accused specific students of performing; and (5) anticipation of future activities where these activities are to be



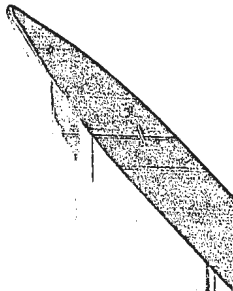


used as a form of punishment for not carrying out the present overall role expectations.

The decision to enact or not to enact role distance behavior is influenced by two factors: (1) the actor's interpretation of his relationship with his fellow students, and (2) his assumption of the presence of a relevant audience. The enactment of role distance behavior by any one actor may be unreciprocated or reciprocated by a member or members of the relevant audience. One of the results of reciprocated role distance behavior may be an intricate system of exchange in true and false role distance behavior representing both major and minor role distance.

Only seven of the forty-one incidents of role distance behavior discovered during this research were false role distance behavior. False role distance behavior is more apt to be enacted by the "curve raisers" and the students who enjoy performing the overall role expectations than it is by other students. It was found that those who ranked high in popularity, as measured by a sociometric test, were more prone to enact true role distance behavior than those who ranked low on this test. Also, those with the lowest marks on their mid-term examinations enacted more incidents of true role distance behavior than did those with the highest marks on these examinations. Even though some of the role distance behavior is disorderly behavior, much of it does not fit into this category.

The situational expressions of role distance behavior were influenced by the following variables:

1. The physical distance between the actor and his relevant audience.
  2. The response of the relevant audience.
- 



3. The actor's feelings of acceptance with regard to his relationship with the students in the classroom.
4. The perceived effects of failing to convince the relevant audience of one's role distance.
5. The length of time that the actor assumes it takes to communicate to the relevant audience his attitude of role distance.

Role distance behavior is expressed by actions that are either momentary, recurrent, or extended.

The empirical boundaries of role distance behavior were exemplified by an analysis of related phenomena: (1) role abandonment, (2) fear of inadequate performance, (3) dislike for the teacher, (4) attempting to attract a relevant audience, and (5) student frolic.

#### Problems for Future Research

This is, to the investigator's knowledge, the first time that a field design has been set up to study any aspect of the theory of role distance and role distance behavior. It has been wholly exploratory, therefore, and the findings may contribute to the development of a broader substantive theory of role distance and role distance behavior.<sup>5</sup>

There is justification for using both quantitative and qualitative analyses of research data in future studies of this phenomenon. Now that the presence of role distance and role distance behavior has been demon-

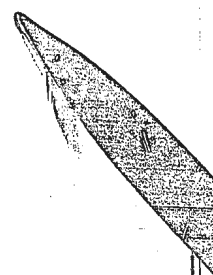
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<sup>5</sup>Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss have presented methods whereby theory can be generated from research data by a continuous process of formulation and verification. Glaser and Strauss, op.cit.



strated, it would be appropriate to investigate the relationships, if any exist, between this type of behavior and certain independent variables. Throughout the study these have been regarded as peripheral to our focus. They include: (1) the style of teaching, whether it is democratic or authoritarian, and (2) the teacher-pupil relationship, that is, the differences that exist along class lines and the differences in the role expectations that various teachers hold for the same students. A consideration of the variables given in a section of Chapter III which suggest some of the dimensions along which role distance behavior develops would also give depth to the theoretical sampling of classroom situations.

The comparison of the development of role distance and the expression of role distance behavior among different groups would give additional scope to a substantive theory of this phenomenon. As a first step, a comparison should be made between different classrooms and grades within the same school and then between schools. A comparative analysis between teachers, with regard to the presence of role distance behavior, would also be useful. While this study did not observe the teachers in the school, it appears from general conversation with them, and in retrospectively analyzing my own teaching career in junior high schools, that role distance behavior is often enacted when performing menial tasks such as corridor and canteen duties. The scope of the substantive theory can be further increased by investigating the circumstances under which role distance appears, the expressions used in the enactment of role distance behavior, and the dimensions along which it develops in different types of groups. The nature of the overall role expectations held for prisoners and production line workers suggests that these two groups might provide an ideal setting for a comparative analysis of this phenomenon.





## APPENDIX A

### GENERAL CLASS PERIOD QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions are designed to get an account of your attitudes toward the forty-five minute class period mentioned, and the expressions of behavior that you used, if any, to express your true feelings or to give a false impression of them. Judging from my experience with other students I know that you will be honest with your answers to these questions. No one except you and I will know what your answers are.

1. Did you like the \_\_\_\_\_ \* period? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2. If "no" to question 1

(a) Did you do anything during the \_\_\_\_\_ \* period to let others know that you did not like it? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

(b) If "yes" to part (a), what did you do?

(List each specific incident of behavior below.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

\*These blanks were filled in with the appropriate subject (history, English, etc.) taught during the forty-five minute class period observed immediately prior to the administering of this questionnaire.



3. Did you try to communicate to some student(s) that you did not like the class period while in actual fact you liked it? In other words you were trying to give a false impression. Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If "yes," what did you do?

(List each specific incident of behavior below.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX B

### SPECIFIC CLASS PERIOD QUESTIONNAIRE

I know that some of you must have liked doing the geography paper and presenting it in class while others did not like either doing it or presenting it to the class. Please answer the following questions concerning your attitudes toward this project and the incidents of behavior, if any, that you used to communicate to others your true feelings or to give a false impression of them.

1. Did you like doing the paper in geography? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2. (a) Did you enjoy giving it to the class? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

(b) If "yes," why? \_\_\_\_\_

(c) If "no," why not? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Did you do anything to let others know that you disliked giving the paper? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If "yes," what did you do?

(List each specific incident of behavior below.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

4. If you liked giving the paper did you do anything to try to convince some student(s) that you did not like giving it? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If "yes," what did you do?

(List each specific incident of behavior below.)

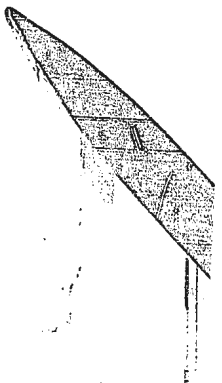
1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_





## APPENDIX C

### GENERAL FORMAT FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED FORMAL INTERVIEWS

I used the following statement and questions as a guide during the formal interviews held with the students. At different times and for different students the reasons for expressing certain specific incidents of behavior and the circumstances under which they occurred were obtained in different ways. Sometimes and for different students it was necessary to probe more than at other times and for other students. Therefore, I emphasize that the following was used only as a guide in soliciting the reasons behind certain specific incidents of behavior.

#### Introduction

I appreciate your cooperation in filling out the questionnaire. Now I would like to ask you a few questions concerning your answers. Remember that you and I are the only two who will know what you have written and what you tell me. If you have any questions to ask me or any problems that you would like to talk to me about feel free to do so.

#### Guideline Questions

1. Why did you do each of the following?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

etc.



(For each student, the specific incidents of behavior listed in answer to questions 2 and 3 on questionnaire A, and in answer to questions 3 and 4 on questionnaire B, were listed here to inquire as to the reasons for enacting them.)

2. (a) Did you enact the following expressions of behavior?

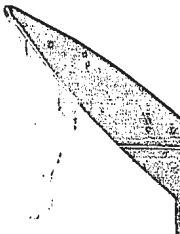
1. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

etc.

(The specific incidents of behavior that I observed for each student, but which were not listed by him on his questionnaire, were listed here.)

(b) For each of the specific incidents of behavior that the student answered "yes" to in part (a), the question, "Why did you do it?" was asked.





## APPENDIX D

### SOCIOMETRIC TEST

Answer the following questions by choosing students from your classroom.

1. If you had a choice whom would you sit next to in the classroom?

1st. choice \_\_\_\_\_ 2nd. choice \_\_\_\_\_

2. If you were to choose partners for any game during a physical education period which two of your classmates would you choose?

1st. choice \_\_\_\_\_ 2nd. choice \_\_\_\_\_

3. If your teacher were to divide the class into groups of three and to have each group do a project outside regular class time which two of your classmates would you like for him to put in the groups with you?

1st. choice \_\_\_\_\_ 2nd. choice \_\_\_\_\_

4. a) Who do you think is the most popular boy in your class?

\_\_\_\_\_

- b) Who do you think is the most popular girl in your class?

\_\_\_\_\_



Method of Interpreting the Sociometric Test

For each time that a student is chosen as 1<sup>st</sup> choice in questions 1, 2, and 3, he/she was given a score of 2. A score of 1 was given a student for each time he/she was chosen as 2<sup>nd</sup> choice in each one of these questions. A student was given a score of 3 each time his/her name appeared in question 4a or 4b. The student with the highest score after all the choices were totalled was considered as the most popular student in the class. Consequently, the lower the score a person received, the lower he is on the popularity ranking in the classroom.



## APPENDIX E

In addition to the twenty-seven incidents of role distance behavior that were presented in the text of this study, the following twelve incidents were also used in establishing our conclusions.

1. Joe did not like the self that he saw available to him in the role of presenting material in front of the class. He feared the consequences of embracing the role and thus he enacted true role distance behavior in order to communicate his dislike to a relevant audience. He did this first of all by trying to avoid reading the paper to the class. He said, "Sir, it's five pages long. It will take up too much time to read it." When the teacher insisted that he read regardless of the length of time involved, Joe moved slowly and lazily to the lectern. Before he started to read, he coughed four or five times and rubbed his chest as if he was earnestly clearing his throat in preparation for reading. Several of the students watched Joe rub his chest and they responded by laughing. Joe read extremely fast at the beginning, but he slowed to a more normal pace after the teacher gave him a stern look.

2. Gerard did not like the self that he saw in the role of being forced to stay in the classroom after the regular class periods were over. When the teacher told him that he had to carry out this role expectation,



he developed minor role distance. He expressed this attitude by talking more and making more noise. He talked across the classroom, first to Wesley and then to Llewellyn. He flicked paper at Calvin and played with his ruler by hitting his desk. Melvin and Joe were members of his relevant audience. Gerard knew that they watched him because he saw them respond by smiling at him.

The performance of this future role would be degrading to Gerard's self-conception. The behavior enacted in the present, when he was informed of his future role, was true role distance behavior to express his dislike for what was expected of him.

3. Marie enacted the following behavior to communicate that she did not like the role expectations of a particular class period while in actual fact she did like them:

Talking to someone across the room.  
Writing a note to a friend.  
Fooling around for a few moments.

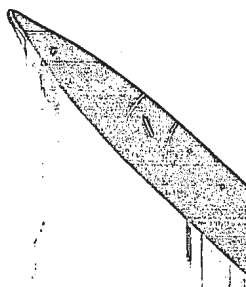
These represent recurrent expressions of false role distance behavior.

She gave these reasons for talking "across the room" to Calvin:

For something to do. He thought that  
I didn't have my problems done but I  
did . . . I didn't tell him about it . . .  
If he knew that I had them done he  
wouldn't like it. He'd say I cheated.

When asked to whom she wrote the note and why she wrote it, Marie replied:

Joan. I told her I didn't have my  
problems done. She thought I did . . .  
I pretended to have difficulty with them,  
but I didn't.





When questioned as to what she meant by "fooling around," she said,

Turning around, looking around the classroom . . .  
I don't know, just looking bored.

4. Gerard was talking across the aisle to Ruby. The teacher looked at him and asked, "Are you finished, Gerard?"

Gerard answered, "No, Sir."

The teacher said, "Well, get finished and talk to Ruby after."

A number of students laughed at this remark as they turned to look at Gerard who was sitting at the back of the room. A couple of them said, "Ha, ha, Gerard," as they looked at him. Gerard put his head down and pretended to start to work. He glowered at the teacher and grimaced at him when he saw that he was not looking.

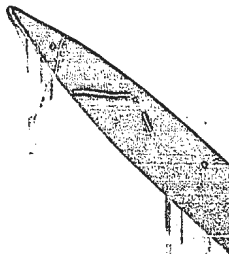
In a formal interview, Gerard said that he did not like the teacher's remarks about "talking to Ruby after school."<sup>1</sup> Gerard said, "I didn't answer him back or say anything, Sir, but I was mad."

Gerard's grimacing was an enactment of true role distance behavior because of a minor role distance for the role expectations which he thought the teacher had imputed to him. He thought that the teacher implied that he was Ruby's boyfriend.

5. Boyd enacted true role distance behavior during the EP. He refused to go to the lectern, at the front of the room, to read his essay, but he

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<sup>1</sup>The teacher did not tell Gerard to talk to Ruby "after school," but Gerard felt that this was what the teacher meant by "after."





read it while sitting in his seat. He read in a low and muffled voice until the teacher told him to "speak louder and clearer." Boyd said that he assumed most of the students would know why he did not go to the lectern. He did not like reading to the class and he did not want "anyone in the class" to think that he liked it. He wanted to communicate his dislike to everyone but especially to George, Gilbert and Arthur. Both the refusal to go to the lectern and the low and muffled voice were expressions of true role distance behavior.

6. Gerald enacted true role distance behavior during each one of the three class periods in which he was observed. He reported on his questionnaire that he did the following:

- a) Got up out of his seat and looked around the classroom.
- b) Got up out of his seat and picked things up of the floor, for example small bits of paper, someone else's pencil.
- c) Looked around the classroom while sitting in his seat and while standing up by it.
- d) Got up from his seat and looked at some books on the teachers desk.
- e) Went over to Clarence's desk and looked on his book.

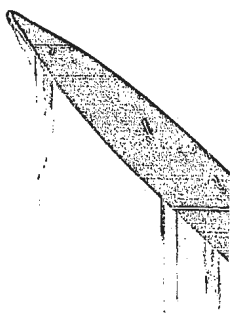
During two formal interviews, I asked him why he did these things.

He said:

I don't really like this stuff . . . I get bored . . . I do these things to help pass the time away . . . I don't like any of the subjects in school. I rather play ping-pong all day.

When asked, "Do you know if anyone watches you doing these things?"

Gerald replied:





I hope so, Sir--yes, Sir, most of the time I see them when I look around the classroom.

The role distance behavior enacted by Gerald represented major role distance. From informal interviews with other students I learned that some of them expected Gerald to be "always doing something." For example, Jane commented, "He's nearly always doing something, sometimes we laugh at him, other times we don't." If Gerald is not doing (something), the students usually ask him what is wrong.

7. Pat had an attitude of dislike for the self available in the role expectations of the science period. He even wanted to abandon the role altogether by leaving the room. He went to leave the room without asking permission from the teacher. When he almost had reached the door, the teacher inquired about where he was going. Pat said, "To leave the room, Sir."

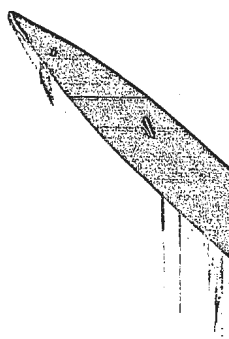
The teacher replied:

Sit down in your seat. You are always running back and forth. From now on you will have to ask me before you leave.

Pat looked disgusted as he went back to his seat and sat down. He stared at the teacher for a moment or two and then he looked around the classroom. After looking around the classroom he said to the teacher:

What's wrong with you? Why can't I go? Everyone else can go. I won't do any work if I can't leave the room.

Pat did his work because the teacher forced him to do it. He explained the consequences of not performing his role satisfactorily. Pat mumbled as he did the work assigned to him.





Boyd, Bill, and Kevin told me that they watched Pat because they knew he did not like being forced to return to his seat and being forbidden to leave the room. They expected the teacher to coerce him into fulfilling the overall role expectations, but they also expected Pat to "answer the teacher back" in order to show his dislike for the self available to him in being forced to do his work. During an informal interview, Boyd said, "We always ask him why he didn't answer back, that is, if he doesn't." Kevin injected, "Sir, we tell him that he was afraid."

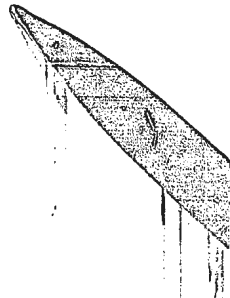
8. An instance of reciprocal dyadic true role distance behavior occurred between Joan and Lilly. Both Joan and Lilly disliked the self available to them in the role expectations of the history class. During a particular history lecture neither of them was observed taking notes. In answer to the question asking them what they did to communicate to the other students their dislike for the period, Joan wrote:

I glanced through an exercise book.  
I looked over my math test.  
I talked to a girl across the aisle.

Lilly wrote:

I talked to Joan.  
We said that we were bored.

Both of them enacted true role distance behavior. Lilly was at least part of the relevant audience for Joan when the latter was displaying role distance behavior; simultaneously, Joan was Lilly's relevant audience. Joan said, "We are close friends. We always talk to each other during history periods." They gave the impression that they enacted true role





distance behavior during all history periods. However, this is not so, for they only enacted it during one of the four history periods during which they were observed.

9. Llewellyn said that if he did not "do something sometimes" he would "lose his friends." He said, "I usually play around during science and mathematics periods . . . I dislike these subjects."

The incidents of behavior that he reported in answer to the question, "What did you do to let other students know that you did not like the mathematics period?" are examples of true role distance behavior which represent minor role distance. He wrote:

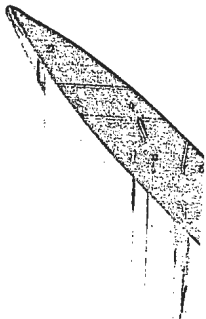
I told the other people I didn't like it.  
I tapped on the desk.  
I turned around.  
I talked to other people.

10. Fred had an attitude of minor role distance toward the self that he encountered in the role of doing a mathematics problem on the blackboard. He expressed it in the unusual way of asking to leave the blackboard and the classroom when he had the problem only about half finished. After a moment he returned, with a grin on his face, to the classroom and the blackboard. When asked why he did not wait until he had the mathematics problem finished before he left the room, Fred wrote:

I didn't want to leave the room at all.<sup>2</sup>  
I only went because I told George that I  
wasn't going to do the problem anyway.

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<sup>2</sup>By "didn't want to leave the room," Fred meant that he did not want to go to the washroom or to get a drink, which are what students usually wish to do when they "want to leave the room."

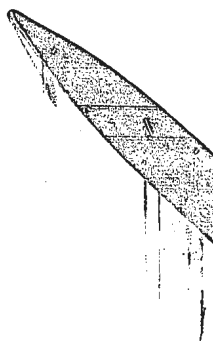




Fred had told George of his dislike for doing the mathematical problems on the blackboard. They both agreed that if the teacher asked them to do either problem on the blackboard they would refuse. The teacher did not ask George. When Fred was asked, he did not refuse, in fact, he did not even hesitate. But he feared the consequences of performing this role without communicating his dislike for it to George. He decided to take this unusual action in an attempt to communicate his dislike to George and to compensate for not keeping his word to refuse to do the problem on the blackboard.

11. Llewellyn stopped taking notes several times during a particular lecture. Each time he would hide behind Gladys, who was sitting in front of him, and look around the classroom. When he saw someone watching him he would grin and glower toward the teacher. At one time he said to Tom, "I wish this period was over with. Is he going to ask us questions on this?" When the teacher heard him whispering to Tom, he told him to stop talking. Llewellyn stopped, but he looked around the classroom several times during the period and grimaced when he saw that someone was watching him.

Llewellyn had looked for and found a relevant audience to whom he could express his feeling of boredom as well as his dislike for the self available in the role expectations of sitting and taking notes.





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