

The Sociology of Everyday Life

Microsociology: Symbolic Interactionism &
Ethnomethodology

Role Theory

- ◆ “All the world is a stage” (Shakespeare, As You Like It).
- ◆ A powerful metaphor: people act in everyday life as if they were role playing actors in a drama
- ◆ Roles (and scripts) are given; people don't have to improvise, they simply play their roles

Status & Role

- ◆ status: a position
- ◆ role: the expected behavior of a person in a particular position

◆ statuses	ascribed	achieved	
◆ roles	primary	secondary	ad hoc
◆			

Roles

- ◆ Primary roles
 - ◆ sex: male/female
 - ◆ age: young/old
 - ◆ race: white/black
- ◆ Secondary roles
 - ◆ occupational roles (mostly)
- ◆ Ad hoc roles

The Revolt Against Primary (Ascribed) Roles

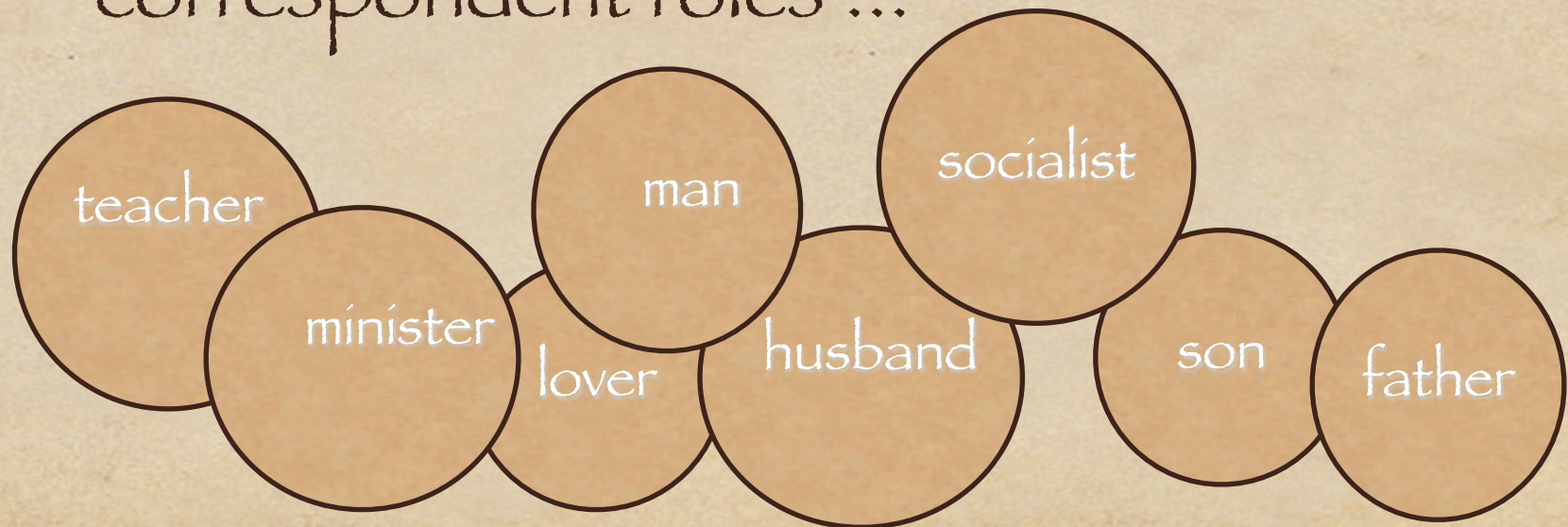
- ◆ racism---Civil Rights Movement
- ◆ sexism---Feminism
- ◆ ageism---?



Role Sets

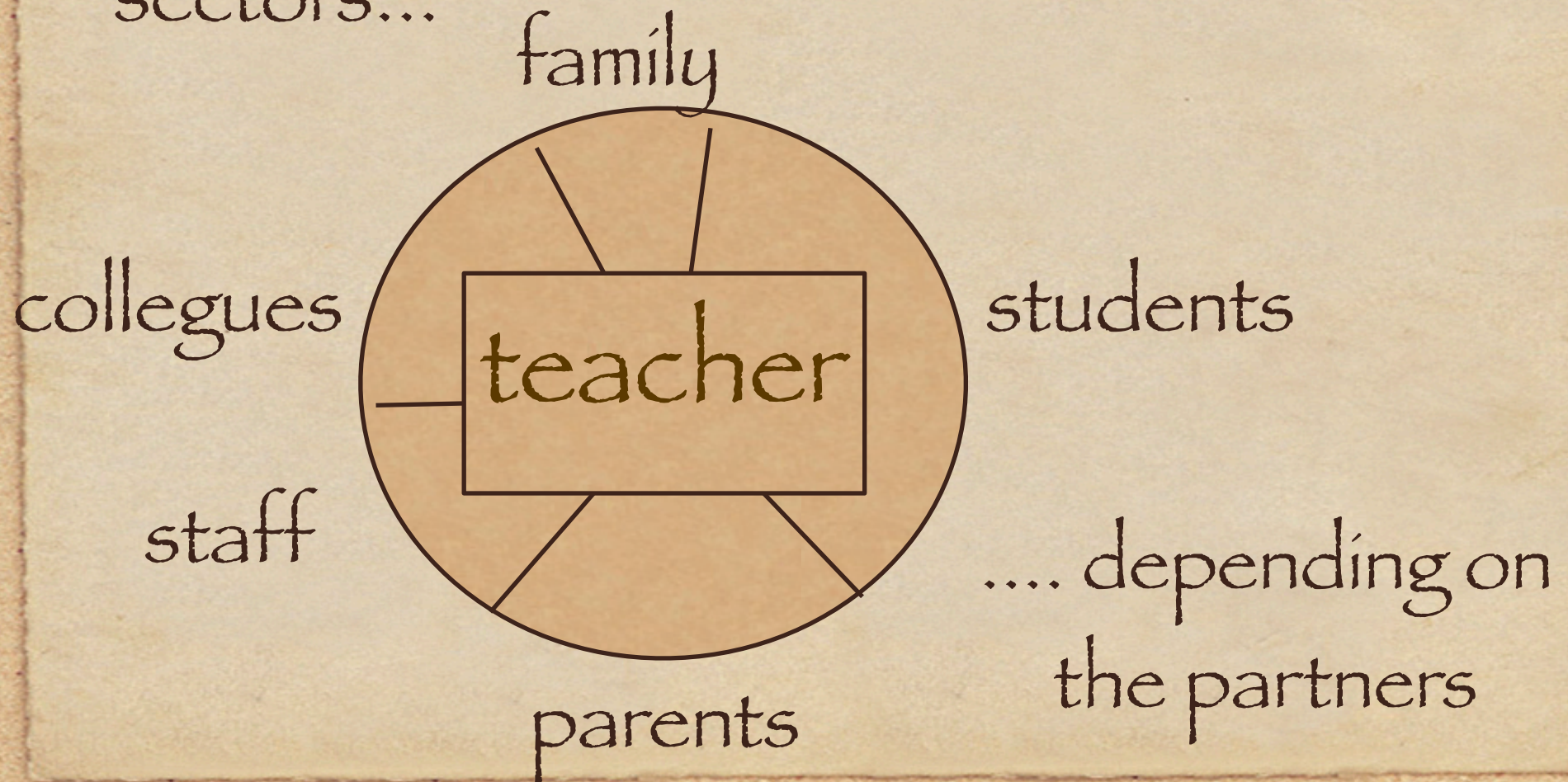
- ◆ Each person has a number of different positions with the correspondent roles ...

group
membership
= identity



Role Sectors

... and each role has a number of sectors...



Role Behavior

- ◆ role as expected vs role behavior as actual behavior
- ◆ differences:
 - ◆ personal characteristics
 - ◆ degree of commitment
 - ◆ role strain, role conflict

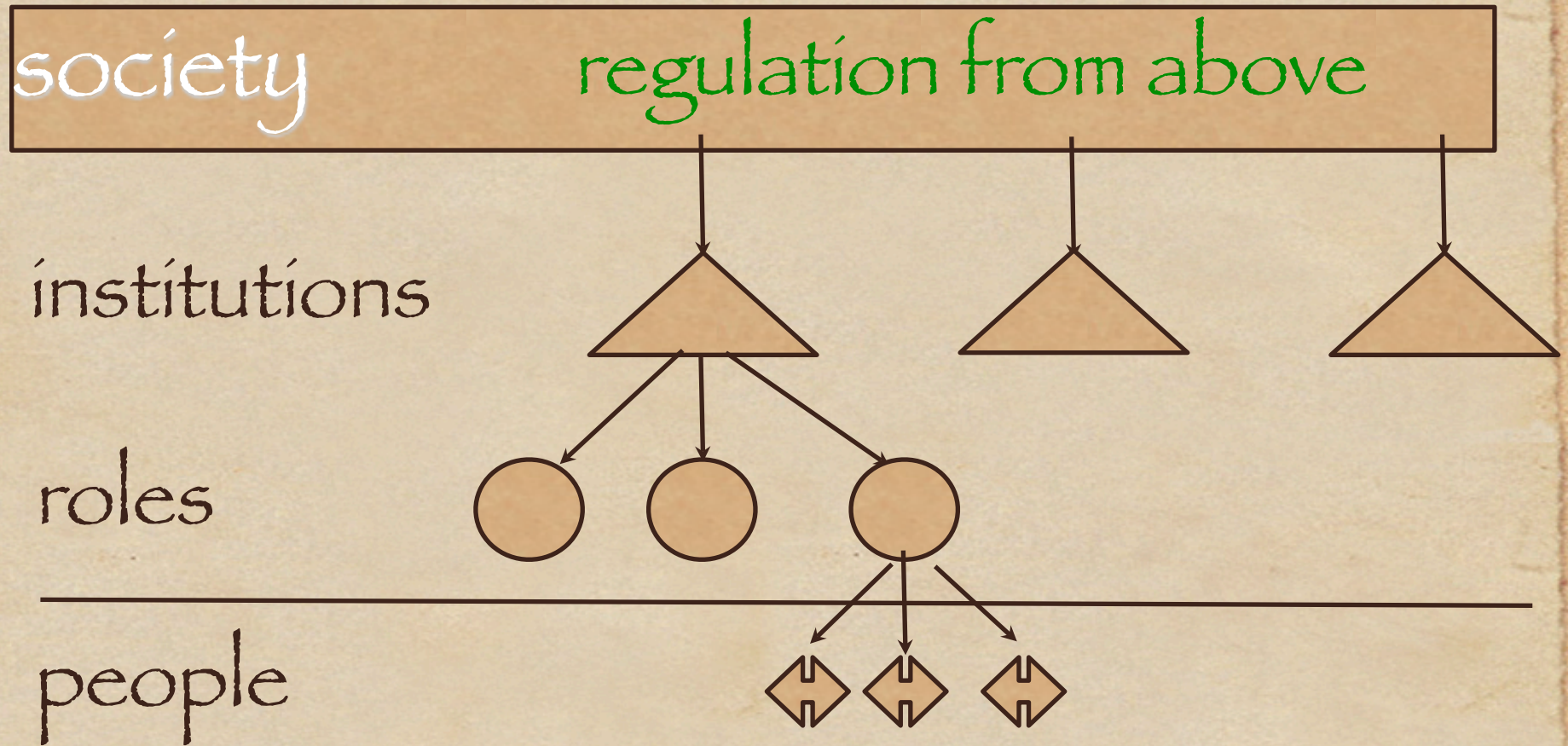
Role Strain, Role Conflict

- ◆ status inconsistency
- ◆ conflict
 - ◆ between roles
 - ◆ between role sectors
- ◆ causes
 - ◆ inadequate preparation
 - ◆ transitional difficulties
 - ◆ rapid social change

Reducing Role Conflicts

- ◆ Rationalization
- ◆ Compartmentalization
- ◆ Adjudication

The Functionalist View



roles = job
descriptions

roles are the building
blocks of society

The Interactionist View

- ◆ building institutions from below
 - ◆ spontaneity, creativity, tentative character of interactions
 - ◆ crystallization of interactions
- patterns → roles → institutions

Erving Goffman

(1922-1982)

- ◆ Chicago
- ◆ dramaturgy
- ◆ The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959)





Impression Management

- ◆ 1. doing something
- ◆ 2. + showing that we are doing something
- ◆ 3. + showing that we know that we are doing it well or badly or...

Role Distance

- ◆ “I am more than this...”
 - ◆ functions
 - ◆ defending the self
 - ◆ securing the success of the teamwork

Ethnomethodology

- ◆ the study of the way people make sense of their everyday lives
- ◆ methods people use in creating and interpreting meanings

Breaching Experiments

- ◆ deep assumptions about the world that we take for granted; tacit knowledge of basic rules
- ◆ breaking the rules to make them visible:
 - ◆ “How are you”
 - ◆ bargaining for items in a store
 - ◆ go home and act as if you were a boarder

Harold Garfinkel

- ◆ California
- ◆ breaching experiments
- ◆ Studies in
Ethnomethodology
(1967)



Conversational Analysis

- ◆ a branch of ethnomethodology: how people construct their talk
- ◆ the importance of language
 - ◆ sequencing of talk
 - ◆ turn taking
 - ◆ adjacency pairs: opening lines & conventional responses