

THE ROLE OF STATUS SYMBOLS IN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

For: Prof. E.W. Burgess,

From: E. Goffman  
Personal and Social Disorganization  
Fall, 1948.

## THE ROLE OF STATUS SYMBOLS IN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

A "social role" may be defined as the regularities in a person's adjustments to or interaction with others, in so far as these regularities may be seen as a response to commonly understood rights and obligations. These rights and obligations are fixed through time by means of legal sanctions and sanctions of the kind that are internalized. Most important of all, these rights and obligations are fixed by being built into a conception of the "self".

From one point of view, a "social system" may be defined as a cluster of roles, in so far as these roles are clearly defined, all-embracing, differentiated and integrated into a single whole. For this it is essential that each member act towards others as if he defined himself and others in the same way that others defined themselves and him. For this, in turn, it is essential that adequate communication occur concerning these definitions.

The rights and obligations of a role or a self are often ill-adapted to the requirements of communication.

