

# Havighurst's Social Roles Revisited

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The purpose of this exploratory research was to review, update, and revise Havighurst's classic social role studies for their relevance in contemporary society. Based on the input of expert panels, 13 roles, Association/Club Member, Citizen, Daughter/Son, Friend, Grandparent, Home/Services Manager, Kin/Relative, Learner, Leisure Time Consumer, Parent, Religious Affiliate, Spouse/Partner, and Worker, were incorporated into an instrument to assess social role importance. The instrument was administered to a stratified, quota sample of 300 respondents. Univariate repeated-measures analysis and Dunn's test for multiple comparisons were conducted. Perceived social role importance ratings were established for age, gender, and socio-economic status (SES) groupings. The Friend role and a cluster of family-associated roles received the highest overall ratings. Many roles appeared to have a distinct age-related factor. SES differences, particularly among the lowest level, were also significant in many roles.

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## HAVIGHURST AND HIS SOCIAL ROLE CONCEPT

Adult development continues to play a vital part in understanding the practice of adult education. From a psychological perspective, the development of adults is significantly different from that of children because adulthood is composed of more extensive and complex roles. Numerous scholars have studied and developed various theories, models, and frameworks concerning adult development in an attempt to understand its complexity and relationships. Some have framed their studies from a life-stage perspective, others from a life cycle perspective, and still others from a more integrative framework (Erikson, 1978;

Gould, 1978; Hughes & Graham, 1990; Hughes, Graham, & Galbraith, 1986; Levinson, 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1996; Vaillant, 1978, 2002).

One of the early pioneers in the study of adult development was Robert J. Havighurst, a developmental psychologist at the University of Chicago. His work provided a foundation for others to build upon future adult development models. The work of Havighurst (1953, 1957, 1970, 1973) constitutes a major contribution to the understanding of human development from the perspective of roles in life. Havighurst proposed a theory of adult development that tied specific developmental periods to particular age-specific behaviors. Havighurst was one of the earlier researchers to propose the "link between age-appropriate tasks and behaviors and the fostering of learning activities for adults ... [which] he termed the 'teachable moment'" (Merriam & Cafferella, 1999, p. 102). This difference between adults and children is clearly illustrated by Havighurst's developmental tasks for different life stages "[where] ... there is a shift in functioning as an adult" (Merriam & Cafferella, 1999, p. 390). Whereas children's developmental processes are a product of biological

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maturation, the developmental progress of adults is based primarily on social roles (Chickering & Havighurst, 1981; Havighurst, 1953, 1957, 1973; Havighurst & Albrecht, 1953; Havighurst, Munnichs, Neugarten, & Tomae, 1969; Havighurst & Orr, 1956).

The construct of social role refers to a pattern of behaviors and attitudes related to a specific function or position as defined and expected by society. Social roles are those societal conventions to which adults are expected to conform; a majority of adult life is spent functioning in the various roles (Havighurst & Orr, 1956). More simply put, social roles are the different hats we wear as we progress through life. Furthermore, it was suggested by Hughes and Graham (1990) that social roles must be both positional and societal expected within norms established by societal conventions. Merriam and Cafferella (1999) stated that, "this focus on social roles has fostered a number of research traditions in such areas as career development and marriage and family roles" (p. 120). Most recently, Galbraith and James (2002) developed a rationale for using social roles constructs as the basis for improving the higher education institution through curriculum development, faculty and students services, and institutional enhancement.

Havighurst (1973) claimed that as much as 90% of an adult's waking time is spent in one or more of a dozen plus roles. Havighurst and his research associates identified a total of 16 distinct social roles in a series of studies (Havighurst & Albrecht, 1953; Havighurst et al., 1969; Havighurst & Orr, 1956). The social roles were: Parent, Neighbor, Citizen, Spouse, Acquaintance, Friend, Kin, Worker, User of Leisure, Grandparent, Homemaker, Church Member, Club or Association Member, Child of Aging Parents, Great Grandparent, and Colleague at Work. He also believed that "educational programs can be conceived to help people improve their performance of [such] roles" (Havighurst, 1973, p. 598).

Havighurst and Orr (1956) implied that specific social roles provided strong motivation for people to perform well. The three roles identified as producing the strongest motivation to perform well in were Worker, Parent, and User of Leisure Time. The three roles that created the lowest motivation for people to perform well in were Citizen, Church Member, and Club or Association Member. One impetus for further research into social roles was whether there had been a shift in motivating forces influencing social roles over the 50 years since Havighurst conducted his research studies. A shift, if present, has major

implications for instruction, program planning, and organization.

Since Havighurst's initial research, beginning in the late 1940s, extensive changes in both the social structure and the culture of the United States may have rendered previous research data on Havighurst's social roles obsolete. Increases in overall population, individual longevity and the resultant increases in the older adult segment of the population demographic changes have occurred in the past 50 years. Social changes especially in racial/ethnic composition, strides toward racial equality, and the impact of technological development on everyday life also influence the society of today much differently from that of Havighurst. The economic shift from an industrial-based economy to a service-oriented economy, as well as, an increase in the overall education level with the accompanying emphasis on lifelong learning and the parallel changes in expectations tied to education all serve to denote a current US society that is vastly different from the 1950s.

Thus, these changing societal norms and expectations, rapid advances in information systems, the increased role of women in the workplace, geographic mobility, expanded global awareness among nations, and worldwide economic realities have all created the need for revising Havighurst's social role concept. Havighurst's research, *The Kansas City Study of Adult Life (1952-1955)*, although dated, formed an important basis for exploring developmental tasks within an individual's social roles (Boucouvalas & Krupp, 1989). Similarly, Merriam and Cafferella (1999) suggested that, "the time frame and some of the tasks [of] Havighurst ... are [were] somewhat dated ..." (p. 103). Although Havighurst's original Kansas City study involved primarily middle-age, middle class, mid-America, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, Orr's research did consider a comparison of a sub-group of young aged individuals (25-30 years). One of the most striking findings was that young women did not have a worker role (Havighurst & Orr, 1956).

Several additional variances exist between the research framework of Havighurst and the framework of the presently reported research. For instance, the Havighurst role of homemaker was examined using two distinct instruments: one for males and one for females. In a similar vein, the early research narrowly defined the religious affiliate role as primarily encompassing Christian religious practices, while the scope of the later research was widened to include diverse religious practices other than Christian.

Further, the original spouse role included only heterosexual individuals who were legally married and the role of citizen was narrowly defined by patriotic and political activity. Both roles were operationally expanded in order to examine a less restrictive and, therefore, more comprehensive role performance.

The driving force behind this research has been to determine whether Havighurst's studies maintained relevance over time. The purpose of this research was to engage in an exploratory study to review, update, and revise Havighurst's classic social role studies for their relevance in contemporary society. The primary question addressed by this study focused on whether or not Havighurst's findings remained relevant 50 years later. Havighurst and Orr (1956) professed that "Adult education faces the tasks of assisting people to clarify their personal and social goals...implementing their efforts to find satisfying ways to move toward the achievement of their goals" (p. 64). By maximizing Havighurst's social role investigations, questions related to changes in role content, importance, or existence of the role can provide additional insights for adult education.

Role participation has regularly been researched in relation to socioeconomic status (SES) level, gender, and age as an attempt to determine patterns of participation for adults. A crucial component of this research was to compare responses by the three variables (age, gender, and SES level) that Havighurst addressed in his research studies. However, Havighurst (1953, 1957, 1970) used only limited populations consisting of primarily middle and older age groups, the middle SES level, and traditional families. For this research, a valid estimate of socioeconomic status was needed to control for lifestyle differences, eliminate possible confounding variables and provide data comparable to Havighurst's original findings. The importance of SES was described by Warner, Meeker, and Eells (1960) as a "major determinant of individual decisions and indirectly influenced by our class order; and that major decisions of most individuals are partly controlled by it" (p. 6). A concerted effort was to ensure the entire adult age range (18 to 90+ years), a range of SES levels, and both genders were included as part of the study procedures.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The activities of this research study used expert groups to revise Havighurst's social roles and identify the major contemporary social roles. An Initial

Validation Panel and a Verification Panel consisted of experts in adult education, research and measurement, and subject area specialists who identified the social roles they believed were applicable in today's society (Abney, 1993; James et al., 1996; McCoy, 1993). The beginning of the solicited input started with the identification of Havighurst's roles from all his reported studies (Havighurst, 1953, 1957, 1970; Havighurst & Albrecht, 1953; Havighurst et al., 1969; Havighurst & Orr, 1956)—these consisted of 16 different roles, although none of Havighurst's individual studies included all 16 social roles. Whenever one panel disagreed with the other panel, additional feedback was requested until consensus was reached. Based on this process, 13 contemporary social roles were identified for further study: Association/Club Member, Citizen, Daughter/Son, Friend, Grandparent, Home/Services Manager, Kin/Relative, Learner, Leisure Time Consumer, Parent, Religious Affiliate, Spouse/Partner, and Worker.

Twelve of the roles were consistent with Havighurst's previously identified roles. Neighbor, Acquaintance, Colleague at work, and Great Grandparent were rejected as contemporary adult social roles. Neighbor and Acquaintance were not perceived to be major roles; Colleague at Work was subsumed under the Worker role; and Great Grandparent was subsumed under the Grandparent role. One additional role was identified—the Adult Learner Role was determined to constitute a role that was not previously recognized.

Once the major social roles were identified and consensus was reached on the final list, a survey was provided to a cross section of adults. Survey participants were asked to complete two tasks concerning social roles and development events. First, the participants rated how important on a five-point scale of very important to very unimportant each of the adult social roles was important to them. And second, participants were asked to identify specific social role activities or events that they performed in each of the roles (Abney, 1993).

The final activity of the research assessed perceived social role importance in an adult population dispersed by age, gender, and SES levels. A stratified quota sampling technique was used to gather data from 300 participants. The responses were then categorically arrayed into 30 cells by age (3 groups) and SES (5 groups), and gender (2 groups). Three age groups, based on the Havighurst studies, were Young (18 to 34-years old), Middle (35 to 64-years old), and Older (age 65 and above). Gender was self-reported into two groups.

Five SES levels and estimated percentage of the United States population for each of the levels were Disenfranchised (15%), Working (25%), Lower Middle (35%), Upper Middle (20%), and Elite (5%) (Beeghley, 1989; Robertson, 1989; Rossides, 1990). Special procedures, based on the Nam-Powers Socioeconomic Status measure (Nam & Powers, 1983), were developed to ensure that respondent SES level was identified in a systematic process (James & Abney, 1992). Placement in a specific SES level was based on income, education, and job status. Occupation is generally a function of education and highly related to income; therefore, most SES investigators accept that the three factors of education, income, and occupation are very highly intercorrelated (Beeghley, 1989; Nam & Powers, 1983; Robertson, 1989; Rossides, 1990; Warner et al., 1960).

For this research, SES was calculated using the three factors of occupation, family income, and formal education. Abney (1993) provides a more comprehensive description of the process. In order to establish the five SES levels of Disenfranchised, Working, Lower Middle, Upper Middle, and Elite it was necessary to identify five levels for each of the three factors that comprised the SES level.

Occupational status was based on the Nam-Powers-Terrie occupational scores (Nam & Terrie, 1988) organized into five status levels generally described as (1) unskilled laborers/chronically unemployed, (2) blue collar workers, (3) sales and skills craftsmen, (4) managers and administrators, and (5) executives and elite professionals. Income levels included the monetary categories: (1) under \$10,000, (2) \$10,000 to \$24,999, (3) \$25,000 to \$49,999, (4) \$50,000 to \$99,999, and (5) over \$100,000. Education attainment levels were (1) less than high school, (2) high school graduate or vocational school, (3) two years of college, (4) college graduate or master's degree, and (5) doctoral or professional degree.

Each individual was placed in one of the five categories for each factor (income, education, occupation status). Two of the three category levels had to match, with the third factor being no more than one level removed. For example, an individual placed in the education level of 2 (high school graduate), income level 2 (\$10,000–24,999), and occupation status 2 (blue collar worker) would be identified a Working SES level individual. One of the three categories could vary by one level—in other words, only one of the three factors could be a level one or a level three. This individual could

be a level 2 in occupation status and income, but a level 1 in education (or a level 3), but never a level 4.

From the data collected, analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted on the importance ratings. Specifically, a four-factor mixed-model ANOVA was computed. Three of the factors (SES, Age, and Gender) were factors selected because previous research implied that they might be important variables to consider during the research. Dunn's test was used when multiple comparison procedures were needed to identify specific relationships where significant differences existed.

Based on the responses from the panels and the Survey, the following 13 social roles were identified as the major adult social roles for contemporary society: Friend, Spouse/Partner, Kin/Relative, Learner, Daughter/Son, Parent, Citizen, Home/Services Manager, Worker, Leisure Time Consumer, Religious Affiliate, Grandparent, and Association/Club Member. The final definitions which emerged as a result of the panel deliberations were as follows:

- *Friend* is the interaction with both females and males with whom one has chosen to spend time and develop a relationship.
- *Spouse/Partner* includes activities associated with one's marriage or intimate relationship involving both couple and individual identity.
- *Kin/Relative* role encompasses the relationships and activities with all relatives other than parents, children, and spouses.
- *Learner* role activities relate to the acquisition of knowledge and the development of learning skills.
- *Daughter/Son* is one's adult relationship and activities with parents/stepparents or with the spouse's parents/stepparents.
- *Parent* includes the relationship and activities relating to being a father, mother, or stepparent.
- *Citizen* involves community/civic, environmental, political, patriotic, or volunteer activities related to neighborhood, town, state, national, or international social issues/concerns.
- *Home/Services Manager* role includes activities involved in acquiring a place to live, managing ordinary household tasks, handling financial aspects of living, and performing as a consumer of various services.
- *Worker* includes activities related to the job for which one receives pay or still performs although retired.
- *Leisure Time Consumer* includes the activities undertaken for recreation or diversion during one's discretionary time.
- *Religious Affiliate* pertains to participating in religious activities related to one's beliefs in a spiritual being(s).
- *Grandparent* role consists of the relationships and activities related to being a grandparent.
- *Association/Club Member* includes participation and activities in organized groups, involving social, civic, fraternal, athletic, patriotic, and/or auxiliary groups.



## INITIAL FINDINGS OF SOCIAL ROLE IMPORTANCE

The mean importance ratings, standard deviations, and rank order for each of the identified roles are noted in Table I. The social role of Friend had the highest mean importance rating ( $M = 4.48$ ). This is logically supportable due to the nature of the Friendship role since it transcends socioeconomic status levels, age groups, life styles, and gender. Family-associated roles appear to cluster fairly high. Spouse/Partner was ranked second in importance ( $M = 4.20$ ); Kin/Relative third ( $M = 4.19$ ); Daughter/Son fifth ( $M = 4.11$ ); Parent sixth ( $M = 4.09$ ). The Grandparent role was ranked twelfth overall ( $M = 3.50$ ); however, over two-thirds of the respondents did not report participating in this role. It was noted, as a comparison, that the Grandparent role was ranked fourth for the Older age group.

Results of the survey also indicated that there were some significant differences in perceived role importance based on gender, age, and SES level. However, these differences were not uniform across all roles, but rather were unique to specific roles and variable interactions. Other factors, which contributed to overall ratings of role importance, are noteworthy. Not all of the respondents in the Survey performed each of the roles, as is true in the general adult population. Therefore, while some roles, such as Parent and Grandparent, are tremendously important to those adults who fulfill those roles, others, such as Friend and Kin/Relative, are rated

higher overall because the majority of adults customarily perform these roles.

Investigation into socioeconomic status impact is presented in Table II. SES level appeared to account for the largest number of differences. Significant differences also existed in the perceived importance of the roles within subjects in each of the age, gender, and SES categories.

The mean scores of social role importance by SES level are presented in Table III. Significant differences related to SES level were further examined using Dunn's multiple comparison procedure. Differences were found in the roles of Association/Club Member, Daughter/Son, Grandparent, Spouse/Partner, and Worker. In the roles of Association/Club Member, Daughter/Son, Spouse/Partner, and Worker, the Disenfranchised SES level was significantly lower than all or most of the other SES levels. In the Grandparent role, the Disenfranchised and Elite levels were significantly lower than the Working and Middle SES levels.

The mean social role importance by gender and age are presented in Table IV. Analysis of the data related to gender revealed that significant differences existed in the perceived importance in the roles of Citizen, Home/Services Manager, Religious Affiliate, and Worker. Females rated the roles of Home/Services Manager and Religious Affiliate significantly higher than males. Males tended to rate the Worker and Citizen roles higher than females.

Significant differences by age existed in the roles of Association/Club Member, Citizen, Daughter/Son, Grandparent, and Worker. Young adults also rated the Citizen and Grandparent roles significantly lower than the other two age groups. The Daughter/Son and Worker roles were perceived to be significantly less important by the Older age group than the other age groups. The Grandparent role was rated significantly higher by the Older age group. The Middle-age group rated Association/Club Member as significantly lower than the other two age groups. The Worker role was perceived to be significantly more important for the Middle-age group than for the other two age groups.

## INDIVIDUAL ROLES

Discussion of each role is presented in the rank order of importance. Findings related to the specific social role and its relation to age, gender, and SES level are addressed.

**Table I.** Mean Social Role Importance Ratings, Standard Deviations, and Rank Order

Role	Mean	SD	Rank
Association/Club Member	3.05	1.24	13
Citizen	4.09	0.93	7
Daughter/Son	4.11	1.29	5
Friend	4.48	0.66	1
Grandparent	3.50	1.52	12
Home/Service Manager	3.70	0.97	8
Kin/Relative	4.19	0.85	3
Learner	4.16	0.87	4
Leisure Time Consumer	3.88	0.89	10
Parent	4.09	1.38	6
Religious Affiliate	3.74	1.30	6
Spouse/Partner	4.20	1.33	2
Worker	3.90	1.19	9
Grand Mean	3.95	1.11	

Note.  $N = 300$ .

**Table II.** Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance of Demographic Variables for Perceived Social Role Importance

Variable	DF	Type III SS	Mean Square	F Value	p > F
<i>Between Groups</i>					
SES	4	76.968	19.242	6.19	0.0001
Gender (G)	1	9.551	9.551	3.07	0.0808
SES x G	4	20.814	5.204	1.67	0.1563
Age (A)	2	2.342	1.171	0.38	0.6865
SES x A	8	17.281	2.160	0.69	0.6960
G x A	2	1.065	0.533	0.17	0.8426
SES x G x A	8	34.866	4.358	1.40	0.1955
Error	270	839.331	3.109		
<i>Within Groups</i>					
Roles (R)	12	472.273	39.356	40.63	0.0001
R x SES	48	189.325	3.944	4.07	0.0001
R x Gender (G)	12	35.872	2.989	3.09	0.0009
R x SES x G	48	95.746	1.995	2.06	0.0002
R x Age (A)	24	257.364	10.724	11.07	0.0001
R x SES x A	96	138.146	1.439	1.49	0.0048
R x G x A	24	45.082	1.878	1.94	0.0091
R x SES x G x A	96	120.654	1.257	1.30	0.0459
Error	3240	3138.769	0.969		

Note.  $p < .05$ .

At first, it seemed a little surprising that the *Friend* role was rated as the most important; however, since this is the one interpersonal relationship role in which all individuals participate, it is not unusual that this role was uniformly rated high. Results tended to be similar by age, gender, and socioeconomic status.

The *Spouse/Partner* role, for those individuals who were either married or who defined themselves as being in a significant relationship, was highly rated. The Disenfranchised participants rated the Spouse/Partner role significantly lower than the other four SES levels. The elite SES level rated Spouse/Partner

**Table III.** Mean Social Role Importance Ratings and Standard Deviations by SES Level

Role	SES Level									
	Disenfranchised		Working		Middle		Upper		Elite	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Association/Club Member	2.08	1.11	3.10	1.19	3.08	1.12	3.57	1.11	.40	1.15
Citizen	4.08	1.18	4.03	1.04	3.95	0.83	4.10	0.80	4.27	0.73
Daughter/Son	3.57	1.80	4.30	0.96	4.37	0.97	4.05	1.27	4.25	1.11
Friend	4.42	0.70	4.42	0.77	4.47	0.70	4.52	0.54	4.60	0.56
Grandparent	3.18	1.87	3.93	1.13	3.62	1.29	3.55	1.38	3.23	1.70
Home/Services Manager	4.22	0.85	4.03	1.04	3.88	1.06	4.00	0.80	3.70	1.03
Kin/Relative	4.07	1.22	4.22	0.76	4.28	0.69	4.22	0.78	4.17	0.72
Learner	4.02	1.03	4.02	0.97	4.18	0.79	4.35	0.66	4.23	0.83
Leisure Time Consumer	3.85	1.12	3.95	0.85	3.93	0.85	3.93	0.80	3.75	0.84
Parent	3.87	1.61	4.13	1.13	3.98	1.37	4.27	1.21	4.20	1.52
Religious Affiliate	3.90	1.37	3.67	1.27	3.70	1.31	3.63	1.35	3.83	0.22
Spouse/Partner	3.22	1.82	4.23	1.18	4.33	1.07	4.48	1.07	4.72	0.80
Worker	3.32	1.55	3.98	0.95	3.97	1.07	4.22	0.96	4.00	1.15

Note.  $N = 300$ .

**Table IV.** Mean Social Role Importance Ratings and Standard Deviations by Age and by Gender

Role	Age Categories						Gender			
	Young (18–34) <i>n</i> = 100		Middle (35–64) <i>n</i> = 100		Older (65+) <i>n</i> = 100		Males <i>n</i> = 150		Females <i>n</i> = 150	
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Association/Club Member	3.22	1.14	2.76	1.12	3.16	1.41	3.07	1.25	3.02	1.23
Citizen	3.79	0.98	4.17	0.83	4.30	0.92	4.16	0.91	4.01	0.95
Daughter/Son	4.56	0.83	4.29	1.11	3.47	1.55	3.97	1.31	4.25	1.25
Friend	4.59	0.57	4.41	0.63	4.45	0.73	4.45	0.66	4.51	0.65
Grandparent	2.92	1.52	3.39	1.60	4.20	1.10	3.39	1.47	3.61	1.56
Home/Services Manager	3.90	1.00	4.19	0.85	3.81	1.02	3.81	1.01	4.13	0.90
Kin/Relative	4.34	0.77	4.07	0.82	4.16	0.95	4.06	0.90	4.32	0.79
Learner	4.26	0.75	4.26	0.68	3.96	1.10	4.15	0.92	4.17	0.82
Leisure Time Consumer	3.87	0.94	4.00	0.78	3.78	0.95	3.79	0.95	3.97	0.83
Parent	3.92	1.50	4.14	0.14	4.21	1.20	4.01	1.38	4.17	1.37
Religious Affiliate	3.56	0.12	3.69	1.30	3.99	1.30	3.57	1.35	3.92	1.23
Spouse/Partner	4.38	1.20	4.11	1.40	4.10	1.40	4.22	1.32	4.17	.35
Worker	4.06	0.97	4.26	0.75	3.37	1.50	4.05	1.18	3.74	1.18

Note. *N* = 300.

higher than any of the other social roles. No gender-based differences were found within the Spouse/Partner role.

The *Kin/Relative* role included those relationships among siblings, nephews, nieces, cousins, and spouse's relatives as well as other familial relationships not specifically identified. Females and young adults tended to rate this role higher than the other social roles. No other SES level or age group differences were found.

In the *Learner role*, the Older age group and the Disenfranchised and Working SES levels rated the Learner role significantly lower than the other SES levels. No other significant differences were found for age, gender, and SES levels.

Females tended to rate the Daughter/Son role higher than males, while the Older age group rated this role much lower than the other two groups. This latter rating was influenced by the demise of the parents of the Older age group and the reduction of current role activities. SES level ratings, except for a lower rating by the Disenfranchised, were similar by category.

It is important to note that over one-third of the respondents did not participate in the Parent role, because they did not have children. Within the respondents, there were no significant differences by SES level, age, or gender.

The Disenfranchised rated the Citizen role significantly lower than the other SES categories. The other SES level ratings, as well as all gender and age comparisons were similar.

The findings of the Home/Services Manager role indicated that females, middle-aged adults, and the Disenfranchised SES level rated this role higher than other comparison groups.

Many respondents who were retired and were no longer participating in the Worker role impacted the overall rating of this role. The Older age groups rated the Worker role lower than the Middle or Young age group. Also, the Disenfranchised SES level rated the importance of this role significantly lower than the other SES levels. This rating may be attributed to the definition of Disenfranchised, which included individuals in the lowest paying jobs and/or those who were not employed. Males tended to perceive this role to be more important than did females.

Middle-aged adults tended to rate the importance of the Leisure Time Consumer role higher than the other groups. No significant differences were found by gender, age, or SES level.

Females, Older adults, and the Disenfranchised SES level tended to rate the Religious Affiliate Role as more important than did the other groups. The low overall rating of the Grandparent role was anticipated as most individuals under the age of 35 years are rarely grandparents and many middle-aged adults are also not grandparents. For the Older age group, three other roles (Friend, Citizen, and Parent) were rated as more important than the Grandparent role. This was the least important role for the Young age group. Women tended to perceive the Grandparent role to be slightly more important

than did males. The Working and Middle SES level rated this role significantly higher than did the other SES levels.

The Association/Club Member role was uniformly perceived as least important by all groups. The Elite and Upper Middle SES levels tended to rate the importance of this role significantly higher than the Disenfranchised. There were no significant differences by gender; the Middle-age group tended to rate this role significantly lower than the other two age groups.

Arguably, the singularly most intriguing element of this study was the identification of the learner social role. The learner role was not addressed in Havighurst's work. (Note: Extensive review of Havighurst's archives at the University of Chicago and discussions with Dr. Bernice Neugarten, his research associate, failed to identify specific reasons for the omission). Speculatively, it is possible that the role of adult learner was perceived to be less well defined at the time of his research and, therefore, not deemed worthy of study in the 1950s. That is certainly not the case in contemporary society where learning throughout one's lifetime is an integral part of the educational and societal landscape.

## DISCUSSION

While this research was exploratory in nature and the use of quota sampling techniques and the urban, geographical limits of the respondents preclude generalizability, the study served to support the continued importance of adult social roles in the United States in contemporary US society (Witte, Guarino, & James, 2001). Havighurst's findings and the changes/adaptations of this research remain relevant to the fields of adult development and adult education today.

Within this study, an examination of five social roles revealed no differences by gender, age, or SES level; three roles evidenced only gender differences; age and SES differences were found in three roles; SES only difference was found in one role; and one role had significant differences in all three variables of interest. Friend, Kin/Relative, Learner, Parent, and Leisure Time Consumer roles were perceived as important regardless of age, gender, and SES level. These roles appear to be valued constructs throughout the variables of interest.

Home/Services Manager and Religious Affiliate roles were significantly more important to females participating in the study; while the Citizen role was

significantly more important to males and less important to the Young age group.

Age and SES differences were found for the Association/Club Member, Daughter/Son, and Grandparent roles. The Association/Club Member role was less important for the Disenfranchised than the other SES groups and more important for the Young and Older age groups. The Daughter/Son role was least important for the Older age group and the Disenfranchised SES level. The Grandparent role was significantly higher for the Older age group and significantly lower for the Young age group, who were not grandparents. Disenfranchised and Elite SES levels reported significantly lower importance scores than the other SES levels; Working and Middle SES levels were significantly higher.

The Disenfranchised SES level reported significantly lower scores than the other SES levels. No gender or age differences were found in the Spouse/Partner role. Worker was the only role whose perceived importance varied in significance by all three-study variables (age, gender, SES). Males perceived the role to be more important than females. The Older age group reported lower importance; while the Middle age group reported significantly higher importance in the Worker role. The Disenfranchised SES level rated the importance of the Worker role significantly lower than the other SES levels.

Some of the roles were very important to the individuals performing these roles; however, they were not important to people who did not perform these roles (if individuals were not a parent or worker, the role was not perceived to be important). The majority of individuals perceived the Spouse/Partner role to be important; however, in contrast, the divorce rate is high. Individuals who fail to perform well within a role they value may explain this apparent contradiction.

The importance of this study is reflected in the recognition of the changes that have occurred since Havighurst conducted his research. The present study enhances the understanding and exploratory components of research that began six decades ago. The purpose of this research was to validate Havighurst's social roles; however, the importance of this study was that it not only updated and revised Havighurst's work, but it also extended the boundaries of the research to include additional age, SES level, and gender. In addition, it provides a fertile area of research for realizing the importance that social roles play in adult development and learning.



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