Social Role Valorization theory

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Social Role Valorization, abbreviated SRV, is a method for improving the lives of people who are of low status in society. (In countries of the British commonwealth, the third word in the term is usually spelled valorisation, but the abbreviation is the same.)

SRV is applicable to people who for any reason are disadvantaged, discriminated against, marginalized, and otherwise consigned to low status in their society. This includes those who are poor, of a devalued or despised racial, ethnic, religious, or political group, with any kind of bodily or mental impairment, who are elderly where youth is highly valued, who have few or unwanted skills, who are imprisoned, are illegal and unwanted immigrants, are seriously, chronically, or terminally ill, are disordered or unorthodox in their sexual identity and conduct, or otherwise violate important societal values. The great majority of members of these classes receive either formal or informal services, provided by families, schools, hospitals, welfare agencies, etc. SRV is relevant to any kind of human service, in the fields of education, rehabilitation, psychology, social work, medicine, imprisonment/corrections, and so on.

SRV was formulated in 1983 by Professor Wolf Wolfensberger, a well-known thinker and reformer in human services, particularly in the area of service to people with mental impairments and their families. He developed SRV as his successor to the earlier principle of normalization (see Wolfensberger, 1972), which originated in Scandinavia in the early 1960s (Nirje, 1969) and which he then promulgated throughout North America, as well as in England, France, and Australasia.

According to SRV, how people are perceived and treated by others, and whether they are accorded the good or the bad things of life, depends largely on the social roles they are seen to fill. People who hold positively valued social roles are highly likely to be positively valued, and to receive from society those good things in life that are available, or at least the opportunities for obtaining them. People who occupy social roles that are not positively valued are themselves likely to not be positively valued, and they do not have ready access to the good things of life. In fact, harmful and hurtful things are commonly done to them, even to the extent of jeopardizing their lives, though often those who inflict this harm are unaware of doing so. In order for this to change, people relegated to negatively valued roles need to be afforded roles that are positively valued in the eyes of their surrounding social system--in other words, their roles must be valorized, hence Social Role Valorization.

Thus, in SRV, positively valued social roles are the immediate goal, but the ultimate goal is access to, and provision of, the good things of life, including that good thing of being positively valued by one’s social groupings.

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Underlying Premises or Foundations of Social Role Valorization

SRV posits--with much empirical evidence to back this claim--that it is an inherent part of human perceptual processes to make immediate evaluative judgments about everything: smells, sights, sounds, animals, foods, experiences, places, and other human beings. However, these value judgments are very largely unconscious. This means that some things get judged negatively, which is adaptive in that it contributes to health and longevity; after all, if humans did not **immediately** judge a fanged creature as dangerous, or **immediately** conclude that they should keep a safe distance from fire, they would not survive. But this immediate evaluation also means that other human beings will sometimes be judged negatively. Such a negative judgment usually comes because a person is perceived to be significantly different, and in a negative way, from a social norm--for instance, where wealth and health are highly socially valued, the poor and the seriously ill deviate from that norm and thus get judged negatively. SRV terms this phenomenon social **de**valuation: people get judged by other people as of low value, of lesser value than the perceiver, and possibly also of lesser worth than other persons. To devalue anything means to attribute low or negative value to it. SRV also emphasizes that devaluation is something that gets done to people; there is no implication that any person so judged actually is of low value, or of lower value than anyone else.

Social devaluation is then enacted in behavior that treats the devalued party badly, giving that party the bad things of life, which are the opposite of the good things of life. According to Wolfensberger, Thomas, and Caruso (1996), these are many of the good things of life on which there is much social consensus: being viewed as fully human and treated with respect; being treated justly, fairly, and dealt with honestly; having and/or belonging to a family or small intimate group; having friends; not being subject to extreme privation or the threat thereof; having meaningful work; otherwise being able to contribute to others and to the common good; having opportunities to discover and develop skills, abilities, gifts, and talents, and receiving the expectancies that enable this; being recognized and treated as an

individual; having some transcendental belief system that gives meaning to life and answers, or at least addresses, the big questions in life.

But instead of these good things, devalued people tend to get bad things, among them these:
- rejection (the opposite of acceptance),
- being put and kept at a distance, and apart from, people who are positively valued (the opposite of being welcomed and included and having access to the places where ordinary life is carried out),
- disrespect (the opposite of being esteemed)
- being deprived of the autonomy enjoyed by other people of the same age in society (the opposite of having some say, choice, and agency about one's life),
- being surrounded by images and symbols that represent qualities and entities that are themselves devalued (the opposite of being respected and surrounded by symbols of prestige, worth, capacity, beauty, etc.),
- deindividualization (the opposite of having one's uniqueness recognized, respected, and accommodated),
- being made and kept poor (the opposite of having opportunities to obtain a good-paying job, and build wealth),
- denial of participations in the experiences enjoyed by valued people in society, and thereby diminishment in competencies (the opposite of being given opportunities to develop one's talents),
- being subjected to discontinuities in important relationships, even deprived of natural relationships such as those with family and neighbors (the opposite of belonging to a social circle to whom one is important, even loved),
- even brutalization, violence, and being "made dead" (the opposite of having one's health and well-being protected).

In SRV teaching and writing, these bad things that systematically befall those viewed as of low value are called "the common wounds of devalued people." Members of any class devalued for any reason in any society at any time will be found to experience these repeatedly, at the hands of other people, of social institutions, even of human services that are supposed to be for their welfare. In fact, these wounds are so common that they frequently define the lives of devalued people, and wreak lifelong havoc on them and often on those who are close to them too. For instance, the lives of a great many devalued people are defined by the wound of segregation--being rejected, and put and kept at a distance with other members of the same devalued class--, rather than being welcomed or even permitted to participate in the life of the larger community of socially valued people. US history was long marked by racial segregation, education has long segregated the less intelligent from those of average and higher intelligence, unwelcome immigrants and ethnic groups are often segregated, etc.

Individuals make such negative evaluations of others, but so too do collectivities, and it is collective, social, or even society-wide devaluation that is the most harmful, because it creates entire classes of people who are then systematically, not just randomly, mistreated.

Unfortunately, social devaluation is a human universal, that is, it occurs in every social grouping and at all times--though again, usually with little consciousness of this reality.

These wounding experiences, especially if they are numerous and frequent, commonly engender in the wounded party a disturbed interaction with the world and with other people. For instance, wounded people often develop: a sense that they do not fit in in the world, and are even worthless; a deep insecurity and distrust of relationships, and a very problematic testing thereof; failure sets and avoidance mentalities, so that they expect to fail at any venture and avoid undertaking anything new and potentially promising; a sapping of both physical and mental energy, resulting in less intelligent behavior; anger, resentment, even rage at the world, at powerful and privileged parties, at potential benefactors, even at God. These responses to the wounds themselves make it more difficult for others to relate positively to the wounded party, and can thus engender even further wounding such as more rejection.

One of the biggest such wounds inflicted on devalued parties is being cast into, and kept in, roles that are negatively valued by society, and stripped of whatever positively valued roles the party may have possessed. Every social body, from the smallest group of two to the largest collectivity of people imaginable, has social roles, and people relate to each other largely via the social roles they hold. For instance, people tend to relate to each other as "my son's best friend," "the boss," "our neighborhood mail carrier," "fellow worshippers at church," "the school counselor," "teacher," "good neighbor," "buddy from college," "stranger in town," and so forth. SRV defines a social role as "a combination of behaviors, privileges, duties, and responsibilities that is socially defined, is widely understood and recognized within a society, and is characteristic or expected of a person occupying a particular position within a social system, or who performs certain functions within it."

The responsibility or duty expectancies of a role can be thought of or phrased in terms of what the role occupant ought to do, should do, or should not do. For instance, a person in the role of teacher should convey knowledge to students, should help them acquire disciplines that are useful for learning, and should not use the students as sexual objects. In turn, a person in the role of student should attend classes where instruction is given, should study, and should not attempt to seduce the teacher.

In contrast, role privileges can be thought of or phrased in terms of what the role occupant may do or is permitted to do. For instance, one of the privileges of the child role is to spend much time in play, and one of the privileges of the sick role is to be excused from school or work for the duration of illness. Of course, since the definition of a particular role may vary from society to society and time to time, so too will the responsibilities and privileges expected of the role. Thus, in one society at one time, the child role comes with the responsibility of working to help provide for the family, and may have very few privileges; in another society at another time, this may not be the case. But even though role definitions and demands differ across time and across societies, all societies at all times have social roles.

The negative social roles into which devalued people are so commonly put also have a great deal of universality to them, that is, people devalued for any reason in any society at any time will be found to be put into these roles. These common negative roles include: menace, less than or other than human (animal, vegetable, or object), garbage or offal, sick or diseased organism, object of ridicule or trivium, object of pity, burden of charity, eternal child or child once again (especially likely to be inflicted on those of reduced mentality), even dead or as good as dead or better off dead. Some of these roles may even be imposed with good intentions, with the motive of protecting an impaired person from their own poor judgment or from the spite of others; examples are the object of pity and eternal child roles.

At the same time, positively valued roles that the party might have filled get taken away, such as productive and contributive worker, family and community member, capable student, etc.

People who enjoy higher social status, and who are positively valued in their society, customarily have anywhere from some to a lot of choice and control about their social roles. They can decide what kind of work they will do, what hobbies and avocations they will take up, whether to become a member of a church, and which one, and so on. But people who are devalued in their society usually have very few options as to their social roles--in fact, that is why across time and all over the world, societally devalued people are found to occupy the **same** few, and devalued, roles such as those listed above (menace, object of ridicule, etc.).

Social Role Valorization is intended to address the phenomenon of social devaluation and the social and psychological wounds that result from it. SRV draws on a large body of human history and experience, as well as of empirical study and research, to spell out how to enable, establish, enhance, maintain, and/or defend positively valued social roles for people, so that they may have access to the good things of life. Actions and measures that do this are called role-valorizing; actions and measures that put and keep people in devalued social roles are called role-degrading. However, SRV does **not** say that all this knowledge **ought** to be applied; it only says that **if** one wants to combat social devaluation, **if** one wants do something to achieve and protect valued roles for people so that they will have better access to the good things of life, **then** the formulation and implications of SRV can tell one what is likely to attain this end, and what is likely to subvert it (see Wolfensberger, 1995). SRV is thus not an ideology, nor is it usable only by people of one particular ideological stripe; rather, it spells out what evidence has shown to be effective and ineffective in shaping people's perceptions of each other, and in constructing social roles. Anyone can make use of this knowledge, or not, as they choose.

An Elaboration of Social Roles

Social roles fall into a number of categories or domains (Wolfensberger, 1998, 2013): relationships; education; work or occupation; leisure and recreation (including avocations and hobbies); community and civic participation; cultus, values, and belief; culture; and residence. For instance, some common positively valued roles in the domain of relationship

are husband or wife, parent, son, sister, fiancé, friend, and negatively valued roles in this domain include orphan, and black sheep of the family. In the domain of education, there are positively valued roles of star pupil, and mentor, while negatively valued roles in this domain include dunce and failing student. In work, there are positively valued roles of business-owner, wage-earner, apprentice, as well as negatively valued roles of unemployed idler, and union-busting scab. In the domain of leisure, the roles of athlete, champion, and craftsman are positively valued roles, while clumsy oaf and sore loser are negatively valued roles. In terms of community participation, positively valued roles are informed voter, patriot, and taxpayer, in contrast to negatively valued roles of alien, and non-contributing welfare recipient. In the domain of cultus and beliefs, there are positively valued roles of church choir member, preacher, philosopher, and negatively valued roles of apostate and hedonist. In the domain of culture, some positively valued roles are patron of the arts, musician, literatus, and some negatively valued roles are boor and illiterate. In the domain of residence, some positively valued roles are home-owner, reliable tenant, and good neighbor, and some negatively valued roles in this domain are homeless person and bad or troublesome neighbor.

While some social roles are positively valued and some negatively valued within a particular social grouping, there is actually a continuum from highly valued to highly devalued roles. For instance, some positively valued roles are highly valued by almost everyone in a society, such as those of loving wife and mother, and champion athlete. Others are positively valued, but not to the same degree and not necessarily by all members of the social grouping, such as member of a particular religion, and part-time employee. Similarly, some negatively valued roles are deeply devalued, such as that of subhuman animal; others are devalued, but not to the same degree, such as eternal child or child once again.

If social roles that are more positively valued are obtained, supported, and defended for parties who are devalued, or at risk thereof, in as many of these domains as possible, then the devalued party will be more likely to get hold of and be granted more of the good things in life, and fewer of the bad things. If highly valued social roles are for some reason not achievable for a party, then at least reducing their negatively valued roles--taking some of the negativity away, minimizing the visibility of the negative roles--can reduce the extent or degree of badness of the bad things of life that are apt to happen to them.

The Major Strategies of Social Role Valorization

Social roles also fall on a continuum from those that are entirely dependent on competency to be successfully carried out, to those that are entirely ascribed by the social body and what SRV calls image-based. These two factors, **competency** and **image**, are the major strategies identified by SRV for improving the social roles of the people at issue. In other words, doing things to enhance people's competencies, and doing things to improve their social image, will both make it more likely that the people at issue will be able to hold positively valued social roles.

Image and Image Enhancement

Image refers to ideas and "mental pictures" that people hold about something, and to the symbolic representation of ideas or of any entity. Images are widely used in human thought and communication. For example, words are symbolic representations of concrete objects and of ideas; thus, the word "fire" is a symbolic representation of actual flames, and the word is apt to conjure the idea of a fire. So will hearing the sound of crackling flames, or the sound of a fire engine siren. Pictures and smells are also images of entities, and will bring to mind whatever they symbolically represent; a picture of a loaf of bread may bring to mind a bakery, or sitting around a kitchen table and sharing a meal with loved ones, the smell of baking bread may bring to mind someone who bakes, such as one's grandmother. Some of these connotations will be particular to specific persons, for instance, the smell of baking bread will only bring to mind one's grandmother if one's grandmother did bake. But others are widely shared within a particular culture, for example, in US society, a donkey is an image of the Democratic political party, and an elephant represents the Republican political party, and these symbols or mascots are widely known throughout American society.

Images therefore carry the meaning of whatever they represent. If devalued people are associated with images and symbols that represent positively valued ideas and entities, then they themselves are apt to be viewed more positively, because the meaning of an image transfers to whatever it is associated with. Such association is done primarily via juxtaposition of images to either people themselves, or to things that represent the people, such as services to them.

Image association or transfer from one entity to another is especially likely to happen if the juxtaposition of one to the other is strong, frequent, very close, and if it reinforces already existing expectations and stereotypes (see Wolfensberger, 1998, pp. 62-69; 2013, pp. 86-93; and Wolfensberger & Thomas, 2007, pp. 41-51). For instance, in advertising, a picture or video of a car may be juxtaposed to the words "fast and furious," and to scenes of people having a convivial time riding around in the car. Advertisements commonly juxtapose images of glamour, wealth, beauty, and other valued qualities to their products, in order to get viewers and listeners to mentally associate the qualities represented and evoked by these images to their product.

In the same way, images get juxtaposed to people. For example, the prosecution may show someone accused of a crime in handcuffs, in a jail uniform, even smirking while the charges are read out; the defense may show the same accused in a nice suit and tie, or cuddling his children. These different photos give different messages to those who see the pictures, including judge and jurors, and generate different value judgments in their mind about the person.

SRV identifies six ways in which people are imaged via juxtaposition, often by practices of the services they receive, and how these images contribute to social roles.

1. The physical setting that they occupy or use. For instance, if a service to the elderly is located across the street from a cemetery, or next door to the county morgue, or at the end of a dead-end street, this conveys images of death about elderly people and casts them into dead and dying roles.

2. Their personal appearance and possessions. For instance, an adult dressed in clothes for children, and carrying children's toys (like stuffed animals) conveys the message that the adult is not mature but is of child-like mentality, and casts the adult into the eternal child or child once again role.

3. The other people with whom they are juxtaposed, even surrounded. This is even captured in the folk saying that one is "judged by the company one keeps." For instance, if people are served together with other unwanted and devalued people, if their servers are slovenly and unable to find employment anywhere else, then this conveys the message that the people themselves deserve to be with other people who are of low status, and that they perhaps fill the burden of charity role or even the role of garbage or trash.

4. Their activities, schedules, and routines. For instance, if a work program provides the people it serves with arts and crafts activities, this images them as not capable of real work, perhaps as "big children" rather than adults.

5. The language used to and about them, and to name services to them. For instance, if people are spoken about as patients and their condition called a disease, this casts them into the sick role; if they are spoken of disrespectfully--and especially if this is done by representatives of services to them--this conveys the message that they are not of much importance, perhaps (depending on how severely demeaning the language) even that they are less than human.

6. Miscellaneous aspects of a scenario, including a service, associated with the people. For instance, a fund-raising drive may image the people it is to benefit as objects of pity--in fact, many such drives in human services do just that.

These various juxtapositions contribute to an overall impression or mental idea about the people associated with these images, and about their roles. If the overall impression is a negative one, then the people are likely to continue to be devalued and kept in devalued roles, whereas if the overall impression is positive, this at least opens the door to their holding positively valued roles.

Competency and Competency Enhancement

In SRV, the term competency refers very broadly to integrity of body and mind, what skills and habits and disciplines and motivations a person possesses, including social skills and habits. This subsumes the abilities to see, hear, walk, talk, think, reason, feed and bathe and dress oneself, read, count, exercise good judgment, self-discipline and self-control, relate adaptively to other people, and much more besides. These various competencies all play a

part in securing and holding onto many valued roles. For instance, being able to get along with others, and to control one's emotions, are competencies essential for just about any relationship role, be it spouse, parent, friend, work colleague, etc. Enhancement of competencies thus opens the door to many more positively valued roles than will be available where competency is lacking; indeed, some competencies are essential for some such roles. For instance, some positively valued roles require that their incumbent be able to read, write, do maths, operate machinery, see very clearly, swim, catch a ball, correctly measure ingredients, peaceably resolve arguments, have very fast reflexes, know how to not spend more money than is in the account, maintain silence for long periods, distinguish the sound of a turkey in the woods, tell dark colors from light ones, etc., etc., etc.

So access to at least certain positively valued roles depends on the person's abilities (or lack thereof) to perform the role requirements.

Competencies may be enhanced by sound pedagogies, such as high but realistic expectations; good models for imitation; a physical environment so structured as to inhibit maladaptive behaviors and elicit adaptive ones; rehearsal, repetition, and practice of learning; and providing meaningful consequences. Devices and equipment, such as prosthetics and gadgets, may also help to build competencies, and/or to supplement for competency impairments. And competency impairments can also be supplemented by the presence and assistance of other people who possess the missing competency.

The Feedback Between Image and Competency

Competency and social image affect each other, and this can be for good or bad. For instance, the more competent a person is, or is perceived or believed to be, the more positively valued their social image is likely to be, because competency itself is a positively valued characteristic in human societies. And the more positively imaged a person is, the more opportunities for competency enhancement are likely to be provided to the person. At the same time, people whose social image is poor are much less likely to be afforded the things that make for competency development, and the less competent a person is, the less positive is their social image likely to be. Changes in either competency or image affect the other.

All this is the case both for individuals and for groups or classes.

The Themes That Capture the Bodies of Knowledge Underlying SRV and Its Many Implications

SRV draws upon a number of bodies of empirical knowledge for its many implications. Thus, biology and evolutionary biology, sociology, economics, psychology, anthropology, and semiotics (the study of symbolism and imagery) all lend support to SRV; even history and geography make contributions. Largely for the sake of efficiency of teaching and learning, SRV is usually conveyed (for instance, in training events, and in writing) by means of ten themes that incorporate the many bodies of knowledge on which SRV draws,

and that run through its very many implications in regard to both image-enhancement and competency-enhancement. These ten themes are as follows (see Wolfensberger, 1991, 1998, 2013).

1. The issue of consciousness and unconsciousness. A great deal of the infliction of devaluation and its accompanying wounding gets carried out with little awareness on the part of those who are doing it; in fact, there is little awareness of even the very phenomenon of social devaluation itself. Thus, many SRV actions have to do with raising awareness of these and other hidden realities, about the common hurtful experiences of socially devalued persons, about how the physical and social environments of devalued parties get structured, the kinds of imagery that gets attached to them, actions that cast them into or can free them from devalued roles, etc.

2. Positive compensation for disadvantage, or what SRV terms the "conservatism corollary." Being the object of devaluation puts a party at great disadvantage, more likely to receive the bad things of life--what SRV calls a state of "heightened vulnerability." SRV therefore teaches consciousness of this reality, and the need to anticipate pitfalls, to bend over backwards to protect a party who is devalued or in danger thereof from anything that might inflict further wounds, exacerbate already existing wounds, or evoke negatively valued roles, and to try to employ the most role-valorizing, least-risky measures possible. In this "conservatism corollary," conservative refers to measures that entail the least risk for the devalued party.

3. The power of mind-sets and expectancies. As noted already, the crux of SRV is in realities of social perception and judgment. Thus, the mind-sets of perceivers, and the expectancies they hold for those they perceive, are of fundamental importance, and many implications of SRV have to do with positively affecting what is held in perceivers' minds. Also, it is one of the most well-established of empirical realities that the expectancies people hold for each other and convey to each other are very likely to elicit what is expected, both for better and for worse. Thus, many implications of SRV have to do with establishing and conveying positive expectancies to and for devalued people, which are likely to in turn elicit positive responses from them.

4. The dynamics of interpersonal identification. When people see themselves as similar to another party, when they even see themselves in the other party, this is called interpersonal identification. People generally want good things to happen to and for themselves, and so the more that people thusly identify with each other, the more likely they are to want good things to happen for each other, the less likely they are to hurt each other or want bad things to befall each other. Many SRV measures therefore aim at building up such interpersonal identification between parties who are devalued and parties who are positively valued. This not only reduces the likelihood of any party inflicting wounding on the other--especially valued parties on devalued ones--, but also facilitates competency-enhancement, because people are more likely to imitate those with whom they positively identify.

5. The use, transfer, generalization, and enhancement of symbolism and imagery. As already explained, the messages conveyed or symbolized by images transfer and generalize

to whatever they are juxtaposed to. SRV thus gives great emphasis to juxtaposing positive imagery to devalued people and services to them, by means of the six conveyors of imagery explained above (setting, personal appearance and possessions, people associated with a party, activities and routines, language, and miscellaneous other features).

6. Service model coherency, relevance, and potency. Every service is based on a model--that is, a combination of assumptions, content, and processes--that shapes what it offers to the people it serves. Models that are coherent--meaning that the components fit harmoniously together and address the real needs of the people served--are more likely to be effective than incoherent models comprised of elements that do not mesh, and especially, that are not relevant to the people served. For a service to be role-valorizing, the model must be coherent; its content must be relevant, that is, precisely addressed to the real and most urgent needs of the people served; and it must be potent, that is, the processes it employs to convey the content are powerful in doing so.

7. The developmental model, and personal competency enhancement. One service model that is almost universally relevant is the developmental model, which is based on very positive assumptions about the capacity of all humans--even those with very serious impairments--to learn and grow, and to acquire competencies, given a physical and social environment that convey positive expectancies and use strategies known to be effective. As already explained, competency enhancement is one of the main avenues to the attainment of positively valued social roles.

8. The power of modeling and imitation. One of the most powerful--that is, potent--methods for teaching and learning anything is modeling and imitation. It is a natural way to learn, apparently built-in to human nature, and people are especially likely to imitate those with whom they positively identify. SRV teaches the importance of being conscious of the models that devalued people are exposed to, and structuring their environments to be filled with competent models of adaptive behavior, and especially of positively valued roles that would be suitable for the devalued people at issue.

9. The power of role expectancies and role circularity in perpetuating devaluation and reversing it. As already noted, expectancies are one of the most powerful means of shaping behavior. SRV teaches the importance of being conscious of what expectancies devalued people are receiving as regards their social roles, and using the means for communicating expectancies--physical setting, dress and possessions, the other people in a person's social environment, activities and routines, language, and miscellaneous features of a service--to convey expectancies for positively valued social roles. These role communicators are very powerful in enabling people to fulfill a role; they can even virtually force people into, or capture them in, a social role. For instance, being in a setting with bars on all the windows, being supervised by uniformed guards with weapons who control all the locks, being identified by number, being chained and made to wear a striped or bright orange uniform, cast a person unmistakably into the menace role; whereas being in a setting that looks like an ordinary commercial establishment, being supervised by people wearing business suits, having a nameplate and computer on one's own desk, and having to follow a dress code that

is more than casual, all cast a person into the role of worker in that office. When people are seen to occupy valued social roles, they will be much less perceived as devalued by others.

10. Personal social integration, and valued social and societal participation. One of the wounds that accompanies social devaluation is being separated from valued society, its places, activities, and people who hold valued status. Also, people learn many competencies, particularly social skills, by participating with others in shared activities. Yet further, it is in the valued sectors of society that competent persons who would be good models for devalued people are most commonly found. For all these reasons, SRV teaches the importance of devalued people participating in the valued activities and places of society. But their physical presence alone is not sufficient for role-valorization; their presence must be positively valued by valued parties, not merely "put up with," certainly not resented or experienced as unpleasant. If it is, negative perceptions and judgment of the devalued party might actually be worsened. Thus, SRV cannot be said to promote or endorse what is today often called "inclusion," because for devaluation to be combated, people have to experience each other, and interactions with each other, positively.

Altogether, and based on these themes (each of which is supported by much empirical evidence), SRV has many implications to virtually any aspect of how a service is rendered, whether it is an informal service such as provided by family, friends, neighbors, members of a church congregation or of some voluntary association; or a formal service such as provided by a service agency or government body. As noted earlier, all of this is so relevant because the vast majority of people who are devalued by their society end up receiving such service, and most often from formal service agencies.

Possible Role-Valorizing Actions at Different Levels of Social Organization

SRV posits four possible levels of social organization on which role-valorizing actions can be taken.

The first is the level of the specific person who is the object of devaluation, or at risk thereof. In regards to any such individual, some role-valorizing measures would be for the person to: show age-appropriate and culture-appropriate personal appearance and possessions; engage in age- and culture-appropriate activities; live and go to school and work in settings that are beautiful, and that match expectations for similar settings in the valued sector of society; acquire valued competencies; competently exercise age- and culture-appropriate autonomy and rights.

The next is the level of primary social systems, such as a person's family or equivalent, friends, peers and mates. On this level, some role-valorizing measures would be for the person to associate with, and be juxtaposed to, people who are themselves positively valued in society and hold positively valued roles

The third level of social organization is intermediate social systems, such as a neighborhood, a work setting, and formal organized services like schools and residences. On this level, role-valorizing measures would include service settings that are attractive and

comfortable, easy to get to, located in the midst of valued society and in neighborhoods that match the function or purpose of the service; workers who both convey a positive image and are (and appear) competent, and who are models of positively valued roles; service models that are coherent and relevant to the needs of the people served; and names, logos, and funding mechanisms of services that convey positive messages and do not suggest or reinforce negative roles such as those of object of pity, diseased organism, eternal child, animal, etc.

On the fourth level, that of society as a whole, possible role-valorizing measures include positive portrayals of devalued classes in the media, including portrayals of them competently carrying out various positively valued roles; shaping of positive societal attitudes towards otherwise devalued conditions and the people who have them; laws and funding patterns that support/open doors to competency enhancement and opportunities for devalued classes; and training for service personnel that conveys knowledge of, and competency in, Social Role Valorization and its implementation.

Thus, there are things that individual persons can do for themselves, that families and advocates can do, that specific services and service agencies can do, and that higher-level bodies such as school boards and legislatures and grant-bestowing foundations can do, that will help to create and support positively valued roles for people, and diminish their social devaluation by others.

The Evolution of SRV From the Principle of Normalization

As noted already, SRV grew out of Wolfensberger's formulation of the principle of normalization, which he adapted from the Scandinavian formulations of the principle (see Nirje, 1969, 1985). That principle advanced the notion that mentally handicapped people--the principle was originally limited only to this class of persons--should experience conditions of life that were as normative as possible. At the time the principle was introduced, in the 1960s, this was a revolutionary idea because services for handicapped people were then grossly non-normative--they had most unusual activities and routines, their settings did not resemble any culturally normative settings, the language used about the services themselves and the people served was very explicit in evoking such devalued roles as eternal child and menace and animal, the server identities were not similar or analogous to what would be found in normative settings for valued people of the same age and need, etc.

However, due in good part to the word "normal" embedded in the longer word normalization, the principle was often both misunderstood, and misapplied, even perverted (see, for example, Wolfensberger, 1980). After many years of trying to deal with and clarify these misinterpretations, Wolfensberger came up with the insight about the crucial importance of positively valued social roles that yielded the term and concept of Social Role Valorization (as explained in Wolfensberger, 1983, 1985). But many people never let go of the principle of normalization: they either did not see Social Role Valorization as an

improvement upon it, or they were simply used to normalization, or they did not agree with the thinking behind SRV, or they resented Wolfensberger himself.

Also, unlike SRV, the principle of normalization used a lot of "should" language, as in people should enjoy normative settings and activities and routines, they should be integrated with their age peers in ordinary settings, they should enjoy normative autonomy and rights, and so forth. In fact, it was all the shoulds associated with normalization that caused many controversies about it and misapplications of it.

But as noted earlier, SRV simply lays out what will happen, in terms of people's social valuation, if certain things are done, and what is likely to achieve role-valorizing ends. But whether or not to pursue any role-valorizing measures for any person or group depends on the implementer's values and motives, and implementers will differ on this. For instance, some implementers may believe that a certain condition or behavior that society devalues should not be devalued, and will therefore want to apply role-valorizing measures to people who have that condition or engage in that behavior. Other implementers may believe that society is right in devaluing that condition or behavior, and therefore would not want to apply role-valorizing measures to the people who have that condition or engage in that behavior. After all, there is, at least in Western societies, a large number of conditions and behaviors that are socially devalued, and some of them are outright harmful to the functioning of society--for example, many criminal offenses. Thus, to claim that such behaviors "should not" be devalued would put SRV in the realm of ideology, and a particularly narrow ideology at that. And similarly with any number of devalued conditions or behaviors, claims that the people who have or do them should indiscriminately have access to all kinds of valued roles would be very divisive and could even lead to societal harm. So SRV is formulated as purely **de**scriptive, not **pre**scriptive, a body of knowledge that can be utilized--or not--to varying degrees with all sorts of devalued classes; the decision to do so, and to what degree, with any person or group is firmly vested in the beliefs of the user or implementer.

Criticisms and Misconceptions of SRV

Like its predecessor normalization, SRV too has been subjected to criticisms and misunderstandings. Among the criticisms that have been leveled against SRV are these.

1. Theories such as SRV are often presented and analyzed inaccurately by their opponents, and a real debate seldom is forthcoming. For instance, critics may say that SRV can be used wrongly--which is correct, because as noted several times already, how it is used depends on the values and beliefs of the implementers. They may cite the literature on attempts at co-optation of all civil rights movements as evidence that not all alliances between socially valued and devalued persons are moral, fruitful and advantageous. Yet this fact, acknowledged in SRV teachings and writings, is used to discredit SRV.

2. Knowing how social devaluation works in society may still leave one impotent against it. But this ignores the large number of implications for role-valorizing action on all levels of society that can, in fact, at least diminish devaluation; SRV does not promise its elimination--in fact, SRV says devaluation will always exist because it is part of human nature.

3. SRV's societal impact, thus far, is largely confined to only services in the field of impairment. Again, this is true but it is not the fault of SRV; rather, it has to do with the insular nature of many service fields, as well as the categorical division of state agencies and delivery system, and with the next (fifth) criticism of SRV.

4. The inventor of SRV, Wolf Wolfensberger, was open about his own moral and political beliefs. To many people, these "taint" SRV because they disagree with his moral positions, and cannot separate the facts of SRV from the ideology of its author, even though he was at pains to do so. Also, many of these criticisms falsely represent the actual nature of his beliefs (see the Wikipedia site on Wolf Wolfensberger for more on his personal beliefs.)

The criticisms of SRV are also intertwined with misconceptions about it. Such misconceptions include:

- that SRV claims some people have more value, and others less; but as noted, SRV simply describes how people view and judge each other, this does not mean that anyone is of any more or less value than anyone else
- that SRV supports the valuing of certain sectors of society or behaviors, and not others; but SRV simply takes account of what actually is valued positively and negatively by different sectors of society, and most especially the more powerful sectors, but it could be whatever sector one wants to see a party become positively valued by and in
- that SRV works against or even demeans self-advocacy efforts by a group of devalued people; but SRV only describes what segregation (be it imposed or self-selected by some group or class) is likely to accomplish and what it cannot

Conclusion

SRV continues to be refined and elaborated as it is implemented, and as its implementers discover nuances, what works and what does not, and under what circumstances, etc. There are several SRV Facebook pages, and at least one SRV blog. Occasionally--usually every four years or so--there is an international conference on SRV; so far, these have been held in Canada, the US, and Australia. There are formal service agencies that conduct SRV training events, for instance, Keystone Institute in Pennsylvania and the SRV Implementation in Massachusetts.

And there are informal, voluntary associations in a number of locales that promote SRV and sponsor and conduct SRV training events. These include the Australia SRV Association, the International SRV Association, the Massachusetts Alliance for Personal Action, the

Southern Ontario Training Group, and the North American SRV Development, Training, and Safeguarding Council. All of these entities have an internet presence; see their various sites for more information on SRV and on SRV events.

There is also much literature on SRV. In addition to the works by Wolfensberger already cited, see Lemay (1995), Osburn (1998, 2006), Race (1999), Wolfensberger and Thomas (2007), and issues of *The SRV Journal.*

See also

- Normalization principle
- Wolf Wolfensberger

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