The Power of Valued Social Roles: Accessing the Good Life

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Based on the work of Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger and developed by Darcy T. Elks, MA

“Where there is passion, there is hope”

Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger
Purpose of this workshop:

- Discuss the devaluation people with disabilities experience and the impact of these experiences.
- Think about heightened vulnerability and interpersonal identification as potent advocacy tools.
- Explore visioning and the importance and power of valued social roles.
- Understand the impact of supporting people to acquire, strengthen, and maintain valued social roles, moving away from negative to positive social roles.

A Definition of Social Role Valorization (SRV)

The enablement, establishment, enhancement, maintenance, and/or defense of valued social roles for people – particularly those at value-risk – by using, as much as possible, culturally valued means.
SOCIAL ROLE VALORIZATION

A Definition of Devaluation

The attribution of low, or even no, value to a person or group...

by another person or group...

on the basis of some characteristic perceived as a negative
Identification

Identification is, “The becoming or making oneself one with another in feeling, interest, or action.” (OED)

“I choose to identify with the poor. I choose to give my life for the hungry. I choose to give my life for those who have been left out of the sunlight of opportunity.” Martin Luther King Jr. Chicago 1966

Negative Consequences of Devaluation

Society devalues certain qualities and conditions

- Persons seen as having these qualities become devalued (i.e., cast into devalued status)
  - Are then rejected
  - Cast into devalued roles
  - Distanced from people with a valued status
  - Symbolically “branded” as devalued
  - Subjected to all sorts of discrimination, social and physical abuse, and even violence and deathmaking
Our Society Today Places High Value on:

- Wealth, material goods
- Health, beauty of body
- Youth, newness
- Competence, independence, intelligence
- Productivity, achievement
- Adult individualism, unrestrained choice
- Pleasure and happiness as a way of life

Minority Groups Widely Devalued in Western Societies

**People who have impairments in their:**
- Senses: vision, hearing
- Body: cerebral palsy, epilepsy, paralysis, chronic illness, near death
- Mind: intellectual disability, psychiatric disability

**People who are seen as being very disordered in their conduct or behavior**
- Activity Level: hyperactive, lethargic
- Self-destructive, “substance” dependent
Minority Groups Widely Devalued in Western Societies

People who are:
- Socially rebellious
- Living in poverty
- Unemployed
- Rejected for other reasons, for example, due to
  - Age: unborn, newborn, age
  - Race, nationality, ethnicity
  - Religion
  - Sexual Orientation/ Gender Identity

People who have:
- Committed crimes
- Few or unwanted skills (e.g., are illiterate)

How Devaluation Happens:

A Person Becomes Perceived or Defined as Devalued:
- By being different from others...
- In one or more dimensions...
- Which are perceived as significant by a majority or ruling segment of society...
- Who value this difference negatively
Negative Roles of People who are Devalued

1. Non-human
   - Pre-human
   - No longer human
   - Sub-human: animal, vegetable, object
   - “Other,” alien
2. Menace, evil, or object of dread
3. Waste material
4. Trivial or object of ridicule
5. Object of pity

6. Burden of charity
7. Child
   - Eternally
   - Once again
8. Ambiguous borderline role of the Holy Innocent
9. Client
10. Sick/diseased
11. Dying, already dead, as good as dead, or better off dead
“When the death of a disabled infant will lead to the birth of another infant with better prospects of a happy life, the total amount of happiness will be greater if the disabled infant is killed.”

“Killing a disabled infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person. Very often, it is not wrong at all.”

“Killing...a chimpanzee is worse than the killing of human being who, if there is a congenital intellectual disability, is not and never can be a person.”

Role Communicators

1. Physical environment
2. The people associated with the environment and role
3. The behaviors that are expected and the activities you engage in within the role
4. Language
5. Other imagery, e.g., personal presentation
A Common Response to Devalued People is Distancing

Physical Distancing

- Physical Exclusion (e.g., architectural barriers)
- Physical Segregation: separate facilities and groupings, institutions, ghettos, reservations
- Physical Confinement: prisons, some institutions and nursing facilities
- Physical Ejection: banishment, expulsion
- Physical Destruction

Social Distancing

- Avoidance of Interactions (e.g., ignoring the presence of people)
- Using Language, Negative Imagery, or Other Actions that Degrade People
  - Age degradation
  - Status degradation (e.g., via impoverishment, brutalization, denial of normative rights)
Examples of Social Distancing Between Staff and People Using Human Services:

- Uniforms
- Tags, badges, insignia
- Low sharing of physical space by workers and “clients"
- Different food, better food, or better food service
- Different forms of address
- Separate (perhaps reserved) parking
- Separate entrances
- Special privileges for workers

Image Polarities Common in Our Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>+</th>
<th>-</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Virtue</strong></td>
<td><strong>Virtue / Angelic-ness / Divinity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin / Diabolic-ness / Evil</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irresponsibility</td>
<td>Lawfulness / Morality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criminality / Corruption</td>
<td>Respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pity / Charity</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attractiveness</strong></td>
<td><strong>Beauty / Order</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ugliness / Disorder</td>
<td>Light / White / Bright</td>
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<tr>
<td>Darkness / Blackness / Shadow</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Life-Related</strong></td>
<td><strong>Health / Vitality</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Illness / Death</td>
<td>Strength / Power</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incapacity / Impairment / Weakness</td>
<td>Warm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>New / Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Old</td>
<td>Growth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decay</td>
<td>Humanity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subhumanity</td>
<td>Wholeness / Completeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompleteness / Brokenness</td>
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Examples of Human Services with Negatively Imaged Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution for people with mental illness</td>
<td>Battey State Hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day care center for children with intellectual disabilities</td>
<td>Looney Day Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home for neglected or abused youth</td>
<td>Whipper Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakery employing groups of adults with disabilities</td>
<td>Special Kneads and Treats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation group home</td>
<td>Last Chance House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in / Day center for people who are elderly</td>
<td>Bleak House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholism clinic</td>
<td>Bahr Treatment Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High rise for people who are elderly</td>
<td>Toomey-Abbot Towers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional center for people with mental illness</td>
<td>Madden Zone Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub sandwich shop staffed by people with intellectual disabilities</td>
<td>The Subnormal Sandwich Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home for newborns and children with disabilities</td>
<td>The Holy Innocents, Inc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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- Persons seen as having these qualities become devalued (i.e., cast into devalued status)
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Key Ideas About Roles That I Want To Remember:

Vision is:

The ability to perceive something not actually visible through mental acuteness or foresight. It is the power of imagination.

Webster's Dictionary

The act of seeing things invisible.

Jonathan Swift

Vision is a dream plus commitment to make the dream come true.

Stephen Covey

Vision helps us to act out of imagination rather than memory.

Stephen Covey
Vision of a Good Life
Foundation for use of SRV

A Full, Meaningful, Inclusive life in all life spheres e.g.,

• Home
• School
• Work
• Relationships
• Recreation/leisure
• Spiritual

SOCIAL ROLE VALORIZATION

The Good Life

Valued Social Roles

Image Enhancement

Competency Enhancement
A Definition of Social Role Valorization (SRV)

The enablement, establishment, enhancement, maintenance, and/or defense of **valued social roles** for people – particularly those at value-risk – by using, as much as possible, culturally valued means.
Definition of a Social Role

A social role may be defined as a socially expected pattern of behaviors, responsibilities, expectations, and privileges.

_Talcott Parsons_

Roles Powerfully Impact Upon These Good Things Of Life

- Image in the eyes of others – status and reputation
- Self-image
- Acceptance and belonging
- Associations and relationships
- Autonomy and freedom
- Personal growth and development
- Opportunities
- Material side of life
- Lifestyle
Three Strategies For The Use Of Valued Roles To Address Devaluation

1. Help people at risk of devaluation avoid becoming entrapped in negative roles

2. Assist persons who are at risk to stay in positive roles

3. Help people who are trapped in negative role feedback loops to break out of these and move into positive roles

Assisting People To Find, Explore, and Enter Into Valued Social Roles

- Gain knowledge on how people find and enter into valued social roles
- Brainstorm roles based on personal interests
- Map roles out using the role communicators
- Make a plan of action
Feedback Loop Between Role Expectancy and Role Performance

Adult with Developmental Disabilities in the Role of Child
Role of Employee

- Seen and Treated as an Employee: Competent and Capable
- Seen and Treated by Others as Competent and Capable
- Sees Self as a Capable and Competent Employee
- Responds as a Competent and Capable Employee

Feedback Loop Between Role Expectancy and Role Performance
Role Communicators

1. Physical environment
2. The people associated with the environment and role
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4. Language
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Key Ideas About Roles That I Want To Remember:
In Conclusion

Remember:

- Devaluation
- Heightened vulnerability
- Interpersonal identification
- Vision
- Valued Social Roles.

Potent advocacy tools.

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The Main Themes in SRV

1. The issue of unconsciousness
2. Positive compensation for disadvantage
3. The dynamics of interpersonal identification
4. The power of mindsets and expectancies
5. Power of role expectancies and role circularity
6. Symbolism and imagery use
7. Service model coherency
8. Personal competency enhancement in a developmental model
9. Power of imitation and modeling
10. Personal social integration, and valued social and societal participation
Resources:

www.darcyelks.com

https://www.family-advocacy.com/ordinary-lives/advocacy-making-it-happen/social-role-valorisation

www.socialrolevalorization.com

http://www.socialrolevalorization.com/en/resources-bookstore