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Abstract

It is often argued that Social Role Valorisation (SRV) is a highly guarded theory, and because healthy debate can only make something stronger, this article is a critique of an SRV lecture series the author attended (although he purports to deconstruct the entire theory). Bleasdale argues that a major flaw of SRV is that it presents the social values of the dominant culture as being required to be imposed on people with an intellectual disability, rather than attempting to change society to accept people who are 'deviant' and 'devalued'. **NB. This article should be read in conjunction with Armstrong's reply. File No. 10519. Keyword: Social Role Valorisation**

Deconstructing Social Role Valorization

"It is my contention that this focus upon 'valued' social roles, and the concomitant judgement, usually negative, that is made by service providers, is the foundation stone of institutionalised services. Institutions do not require large buildings or bureaucracies - a management and staff who are in a position to make 'value' judgements on consumers, and to organise service delivery according to what it, the organisation, knows to be 'right', will suffice."

Michael Bleasdale

S Social Role Valorization (SRV) is a systematic method of service delivery to people with an intellectual disability, and other people devalued in the community. Because it is the result of over two decades of academic work it carries with it a good deal of prestige, and has been readily accepted as the preferred method of service delivery to people with an intellectual disability in Australia. This article will argue that, while SRV addresses the long-term, systematic abuse and oppression of people with intellectual disabilities in institutions, it is theoretically flawed and somewhat naive in its advocacy for teaching valued social roles as the prime strategy in service delivery. It has difficulty in generalising its theory to Australian conditions, and requires greater scrutiny of these shortfalls before being adopted at a policy level. Furthermore the development and ownership of SRV by one American academic, and the inflexible method by which it is taught to service providers sets a disturbing precedent for services who go on to adopt SRV techniques.

I recently attended the Social Role Valorization (SRV) Theory Lecture Series, run by Foundations at Baulkham Hills College of TAFE. According to the information sent to me prior to the lecture series, SRV "has implications about the nature and structure of human services and grew out of extensive research and empirical data drawn from a range of disciplines including Sociology and Psychology". The primary purpose of this article is

to critique the lecture series and raise some points that could and should be addressed by the proponents of SRV in order to make it more acceptable to Australian conditions. I will use the lecture series as a framework because, despite the emphasis on the extent of empirical research that has gone into developing this strategy, the theory expounded in this setting is that which service providers are expected to absorb and implement on return to their work.

Theoretical Misgivings

Such a large-scale theory is open to criticism from a variety of different perspectives. I intend to look at SRV's grounding theory from a sociological point of view, but acknowledge that this is but one of many, including the feminist perspective which has been put forward by Dina Bowman in Interaction (1992/1993 Volume 6, Number 3, pp 4-8).

It is the privilege of the academic to read as widely as (s)he wishes and to adopt whatever theoretical perspective that suits her or his thesis. There is a responsibility, however, to admit to which theoretical perspective the academic is adhering, so that the student can read the work with an informed and critical eye. Wolfensberger merely hints at where his sympathies lie, revealed in the bibliography contained in the monograph 'A Brief Introduction to Social Role Valorization As

a High-Order Concept for Structuring Human Services' (2nd revised edition, 1992, pp 76-80). Here the majority of references are attributed to Wolfensberger himself. However, there are some references from some classical theorists, most notably Talcott Parsons (1951) and Erving Goffman (1961). The sociological perspectives that they propose, respectively, are the Functionalist and the Interactionist approaches. Without detailing the criticisms that have been directed to these perspectives in general, suffice it to say that three or four decades have elapsed in which sociologists and other theorists have either rejected the points of view discussed in these works, or have modified them with greater reference to changing and previously imperceptible or unacknowledged social conditions. An introduction to the various theories and criticisms of them can be read in George Ritzer's (1992) book, 'Contemporary Sociological Theory'.

The critical theoretical concern is that Wolfensberger, like other functionalist theorists, conceptualises a largely homogeneous society with a set of values that are 'given'. This is overly deterministic, and does not allow for the detailed investigation of how such values may be imposed upon some people or groups by others. It could be argued that such societies do exist, but there are clearly enough examples of diverse and pluralistic societies where a variety of values are held to make clear that this assumption is hardly generalisable to all nations of the world. While this may initially seem to be a problem of cross-cultural comparison with the implementation of SRV, I suggest that the assumption that values are somehow 'free-floating', as opposed to created and imposed by certain groups upon others, is a fundamental theoretical flaw. In this respect we need to challenge the Functionalist assumptions of Wolfensberger, for, as I will now attempt to demonstrate, to take a pluralist view of society, necessarily leads to strategies other than those espoused by SRV.

Values

SRV relies heavily - perhaps too heavily - on the notion of social 'values', both for its diagnosis of the problems experienced by people with an intellectual disability, and for its prognosis. This is simultaneously misleading and dangerous. For a start the process of identifying the 'values' of any particular society is fraught with controversy. And, more fundamentally, the implications of the concept of 'values' might be a contributing factor to the disempowerment of people with an intellectual disability.

To expand on this latter point first, is the word 'value' entirely satisfactory to describe the moral, ethical, emotional and deeply personal feelings and beliefs members of society may have about the whole range of societal relationships and actions? The word itself has entered common usage from originally having purely instrumental connotations, mainly in the sphere of finance and real estate. To give something a 'value' implies that an objective, rational yet ultimately evaluative decision is being made by an individual, which may or may not be evaluated in the same way, by others. Moreover, it is difficult to accept that the 'values' put forward as those 'valued' by 'our society' at the three day lecture series, are in fact beliefs and morals that we hold dear to ourselves. They are as follows:

a) wealth, material prosperity, material goods
b) health and beauty of body
c) youth and newness
d) competence, independence and intelligence
e) productivity and achievement
f) adult individualism and unrestrained choice
g) hedonistic/sensualistic pleasure

Many of these appear to me to be rather unfortunate hangovers from the 'greed is good' 80s, and even then represent a narrow cultural minority. It is important for us to trace the origins of these 'values', for in so doing we would be able to draw the connection between the 'values' accepted by the dominant groups in power in society, and how these 'values' are constructed as those of 'everyone' in society. Argument will always remain about whose 'values' do or should predominate. But if there is some understanding that 'values' are socially constructed, and often imposed, then the student of Wolfensberger or any theorist can evaluate for themselves the merit of claims of universal 'value' systems. This was not the case in the lecture series I attended.

I would suggest that, rather than accept that we hold these particular 'values', we determine what our 'values' might be from the point of transmission from parent to child. In other words, would you feel comfortable advocating to your

child, for example, a hedonistic lifestyle, and the ruthless pursuit of material wealth? I would further suggest that the 'values' suggested above are not held by most members of the diverse cultural groupings that make up Australian society. And to extend the argument even further, incorporating the notion of our deeply held beliefs, codes of behaviour and morals and ethics in the concept of 'values', is reductive and imposes upon our dealing in society a framework that is necessarily conservative and concerned with material worth.

The lectures also assert that taking the opposite of each item on this list of 'values' we will arrive at what is meant by the term 'devalued'. This is an unwarranted simplification of a term that requires greater explanation of its inherent meaning, and one which does not admit to the processes involved in conferring 'value' judgements upon people, any people, in society. The very fact that a person is 'devalued', according to SRV, is something for the person to feel ashamed about. I would suggest that for members of society to 'devalue' any person or group of people, is a shameful act. SRV is not attempting to shame members of society into changing their attitudes. Rather it is attempting to change the behaviours and lifestyles of 'devalued' people, so that they meet the expectations of those who are committing shameful behaviour. Not only is this unjust, but it also helps to legitimate the system of social norms that created and sustained the notion of the 'devalued' and 'disadvantaged'.

The Lectures' Content (Competencies)

Turning our attention to the lectures themselves, it becomes clearer how the rather limited theoretical basis negatively affects the strategies that SRV has formulated to guide our work with people with intellectual disabilities. Confusion and ambiguity are evident throughout, although the generous serving of institutional anecdotes is sufficient to encourage participants to overlook these contradictions and believe that what we are listening to is a valid indictment of 'community' services. For instance, we are told very firmly at the start that SRV deals only with 'programmatic issues' - it is not concerned with funding matters, industrial issues, political point-scoring and the like. While understandable in the context of institutions, to totally ignore issues of funding and the notion of service management is to separate what is, in the delivery of services, inseparable. And, more importantly, we are told during the first module that we are currently experiencing unprecedented levels of funding in the disability field. So, after establishing an artificially exclusive 'programmatic' paradigm, the proponents of SRV are willing to state that funding is adequate, a position that can hardly be seen to be neutral. I also wonder if this proposition is applauded by the organisers of the NSW CID's Missing Services Campaign.

Additional to the above point is another universal 'given' that SRV relies on to justify its strategies, namely the inflexibility and transience of the service provider. Fundamentally SRV is hostile to the notion of a 'service industry', that employs people both according to the needs of the service consumer, and according to the wellbeing of a member of the workforce. More specifically, the award requirements laid down by unions are seen to be unhelpful to the unlimited flexibility required in delivering a service to people with an intellectual disability (Westcott 1993, 18). Furthermore it is unseemly for people in the service industry to have ambitions and careers. This again is based upon a conservative notion of service delivery, which does not accept that we might work towards a society that provides universal 'welfare' services to all citizens alike. An interesting study could be conducted into the industrial practices of those services who operate according to SRV principles, to see if there were a correlation between SRV and poor industrial conditions for direct care workers. There is also the possibility that the evidence for the claim that workers in this field are notoriously transient comes from the experience of SRV services, which have driven workers away because of poor conditions.

We are led through a comprehensive list of 'wounds', although why this combination of abuses and crimes is categorised under this term is possibly explained by Wolfensberger's desire to emulate Talcott Parson's feat of constructing his own language system. This point is explained in the lecture series, although the fact that this is, in a sense, a process of jargon-making, seems to have escaped the notice of SRV proponents. We are making the provision of service to people with an intellectual disability even more removed from the

consumers themselves, by shrouding the problems and their solutions in a mystical language. Furthermore, the categorisation of these different problems merely as 'wounds' obscures the fact that legislation has been passed to deal with systematic exclusion of people with disabilities from their entitlements, and that a clearer focus on rights and the use of the law should now be encouraged rather than a pseudo-therapeutic approach. Moreover, SRV has identified as 'undesirable' the 'Resentment/Hatred of Privileged Citizens', on the part of people with disabilities. This was expanded in the lecture series as meaning that it was devaluing for people with disabilities to be seen in the role of agent provocateur, as radically seeking an equalisation of rights and privileges within the community. Presumably SRV would prefer that middle-class liberals should take on the cause of people with an intellectual disability (again!), excluding them (again!) from the entire process of political empowerment. This is a fundamental right of all citizens, especially disadvantaged citizens, and there is enough evidence within Australian society to prove that action initiated and carried out by people with a disability is effective and successful, and ultimately more sustainable than that initiated by people without disabilities.

'We are making the provision of service to people with an intellectual disability even more removed from the consumers themselves, by shrouding the problems and their solutions in a mystical language. '

When we turn to the actual nature of the disadvantage suffered by people with a disability, we are confronted with the sociological concept of stigmata, found in the study of what is commonly known as the 'Sociology of Deviance'. It is important to restate this theoretical point, as the notion of disability could be studied within a variety of sociological paradigms:
- sociology of power relationships
- sociology of the welfare state
- sociology of health and medicine

Having chosen to focus on the 'deviant' aspect of disability, Wolfensberger is making a significant value judgement from the very start. He is clearly very worried about the 'image' of people with disabilities, and having come to terms with his own misgivings with regard to what he perceives to be the physical and behavioural aspects of disability, he assumes that other members of society share those misgivings that he has felt. In fact, there are an infinite number of ways in which people may be prejudiced against people with disabilities, and an investigation of the other branches of sociology would provide good examples. Some might resent the pro-active nature of the legislation passed for the benefit of people with disabilities, while the general community is seemingly allowed to suffer under the recession. And others might not actually realise that a person has a disability, and may simply be exercising some domination over a person that they hold some power over. The enhancement of image alone is clearly not going to be sufficient to deal with these prejudices, and in fact it might be helpful to sometimes discourage 'imaging' in certain circumstances. A rule of thumb should be that competencies should always take precedence over image.

The Lectures' Structure (Image)

A good deal of SRV is based on the conscious and unconscious images that people project. It especially targets the old institutions and the ways in which their structures and organisations helped to confer images of disadvantage to those who lived in them, and also assisted in the destruction of individualities of such people. There is clearly scope here for SRV to be active in the breaking down of large institutions, and large bureaucratic service organisations that exert considerable influence over the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. The organisational imperatives of such institutions not only interfere in the individual development of consumers, they convey a message that the institution is of greater importance than the individual, and that the institution must survive at all costs. The routines of such institutions, and their unfortunate placement in isolated or degrading places - such as close to cemeteries - were rightly scrutinised and criticised in these lectures.

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There was, however, an important unconscious 'message' being transmitted to those attending the lectures. In essence we, as service providers, were being told that we had the power to diagnose and remedy the 'wounds' of people with intellectual disabilities; that we were the people who should set goals and standards for people with an intellectual disability in the community, because we are aware of valued social roles in society, thereby setting up the traditional institutional model of care, without the buildings. On the one hand there are the consumers, who are not sufficiently socially aware to understand what it is they require from a service, and on the other there are the service providers who know what is best because they have had the opportunity to study difficult concepts such as SRV. Another message that is received at this unconscious level, is that we as service providers are first required to 'devalue' a person with an intellectual disability, in order that we might improve their social standing by the acquisition of social roles. It is obvious that if we are to use the strategy of teaching these 'valued' social roles, we must first have made a negative 'value' judgement of that person.

It is my contention that this focus upon 'valued' social roles, and the concomitant judgement, usually negative, that is made by service providers, is the foundation stone of institutionalised services. Institutions do not require large buildings or bureaucracies - a management and staff who are in a position to make 'value' judgements on consumers, and to organise service delivery according to what it, the organisation, knows to be 'right', will suffice. A historical example of such institutionalisation can be seen by looking at a chapter in 'Social Deviance' by Ronald Farrell and Victoria Swigert (1988, 110-118), entitled 'Chastizing the Unchaste'. Briefly, between 1894 and 1931 the Western House of Refuge in Albion, New York served to modify the behaviour of women who did not conform to middle-class standards of female propriety (Farrell and Swigert 1988, 111). To quote: Records of the Albion reformatory indicate that the institution served two primary functions: sexual control and vocational control. It attempted the first control of inmates' sexuality, by training 'loose' young women to accept middle-class standards of propriety, especially that which dictated chastity until marriage and fidelity

thereafter. It tried to achieve the second, control of inmates' work lives, by training charges in homemaking, a competency they were to utilize either as dutiful daughters or wives within their own families (Farrell and Swigert 1988, 112).

'It is obvious that if we are to use the strategy of teaching these 'valued' social roles, we must first have made a negative 'value' judgement of that person.'

The notion of imbuing disadvantaged people with the supposedly superior characteristics of 'valued' members of society is hardly modern, then, and one which has in the past inspired the creation of institutional care. For any ideology, such as SRV, to deliver a service on the basis of the 'values' of those doing the organising, rather than those in receipt of the care, is bound to end in failure and confusion, in which only the service consumers can suffer.

One final comment on the notion of images. The idea that a solution to organisational inertia and indifference lies in our blind acceptance of the ridiculous social extravagances that characterise those people who are supposedly highly 'valued', is to once again accept strategies that ultimately are meaningless. To clarify this point I give you the example of the modern tendency to purchase 'designer-label' clothes. During the module, 'The Conservatism Corollary', we were told that people with disabilities must wear designer clothes, and that tracksuits from Target were not acceptable. Is this reasoned advice or just blatant snobbery? When I challenged this notion I was told, quite reasonably, that there had been a practice in institutions of buying clothes such as tracksuits in bulk and in a uniform size, so that no notion of individualism was given to the consumers. But in the community we are often dealing with consumers who have never set foot inside an institution, and yet *our*, the service providers', families', administrators' own experiences dictate that a consumer may not wear such clothes, even if it means contradicting that person's own choice. Moreover, there are many people without disabilities in our communities who choose to

wear these clothes on a daily basis. That they too may be 'devalued' by the proponents of SRV is again reason for these proponents to feel shame for such judgements.

SRV does force the service provider to think in advance of what she or he is doing when providing a service to a consumer, and what messages are being conveyed. I saw something the other day which further challenged, for me, SRV's surety that it has harnessed accurately roles and modes of behaviour that are deemed to be 'valued'. I witnessed a service consumer standing next to a waste-bin in a suburban shopping precinct, smoking a cigarette and ashing into the bin. I thought that it looked strange, and no doubt people passing by felt that it was strange too. However, the reason for the behaviour became clear to me. The waste-bin was standing alone in the middle of the precinct, with no seats around it. Most people sit and smoke on the seats, put ash and put out their cigarettes on the ground. This person did not want to put their waste on the ground, and was displaying considerable responsibility by putting both ash and butt in the bin.

> *'SRV does force the service provider to think in advance of what she or he is doing when providing a service to a consumer, and what messages are being conveyed.'*

What the above example demonstrates is the fluidity of what is 'valued' and what is not in society. Smoking once was seen as socially desirable, whereas now smoking in public and passive smoking are issues of public concern, as is the disposal of garbage in a responsible manner. The person I saw was clearly aware of her responsibility to dispose of her cigarette carefully, and was demonstrating a 'value' of ecological awareness. That she had to do so in such a strange way is more of a comment upon the town-planners' lack of imagination in allocating areas for smokers, than it is a comment on her ability to 'fit in' our community. For me to 'modify' her behaviour to make her actions less conspicuous would involve a compromise of her belief that she is 'doing the right thing'.

Issues arising from Lectures

SRV's acceptance of the 'values' of members of the dominant groups can lead to an exclusion of people with a disability from the political process, a process which is fundamental to their empowerment, to give them a voice and greater resources in the community. It denies the possibility that the 'values' of people with a disability may be different from so-called 'societal values', not because of the disability, but rather because of an affiliation with one or other of the plurality of groups within Australia, or because of individual preference. It does not acknowledge the mono-cultural attitude of SRV, and its re-assertion of the desirability of 'assimilation' in Australia. It also advocates against people with an intellectual disability participating in the struggle for scarce resources, and to perhaps forge alliances with other 'devalued' groups in society to improve the availability of service provision.

An uncritical adoption of SRV at the broad policy level has serious implications for services for people with an intellectual disability. Firstly, the thrust of such services will become achievement oriented, at all cost, and consultation with consumers will be minimal, as the goals will have already been set by SRV. Doctrine, then, as opposed to active consultation, is the order of the day for SRV.

Secondly, the 'systematic' approach that SRV offers through its complex evaluation techniques, gives governments and funding bodies an easy way out of devising performance indicators and the like to make services more accountable. However, because SRV is totalistic in its outlook the evaluation can only accurately measure how well a service approximates to SRV, and hence the whole evaluation process becomes tautological. An independent evaluation of services needs to be devised, and those services that adhere to SRV need to be measured on such a scale.

Thirdly, a comprehensive study of services for people with an intellectual disability throughout Australia needs to be carried out, in order for the gaps in service provision to be made evident. If the expectation of services is to be able to confer high status and what are essentially middle-class values upon service consumers, then the obvious temptation for services, funded on a basis of achievement, is to take on people who already

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approximate these characteristics ie, people with an intellectual disability from middle-class backgrounds. SRV does nothing to include and extend services to those people with a disability who are further disadvantaged in society, such as people from a non-English speaking, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, people with a psychiatric disability, and those with working-class beliefs and lifestyles.

Fourthly, the spectre of 'assimilation' was reawakened during these lectures. In the 'Conservatism Corollary' unit, an example about teaching children from non-English speaking backgrounds asserted that they be taught the ways of the dominant culture, and that they be 'assimilated'. This notion would be repugnant to those Aborigines who were separated from their families under such a policy, and to those Australians who have lobbied hard to see a policy of Multiculturalism take precedence over the White Australia Policy. Not only is any resurgence of the notion of assimilation morally reprehensible, it is also clear from the lessons of history that it doesn't work. SRV should be careful to attune itself to the current policy of Multiculturalism, and realise that this allows for a multitude of 'value' systems.

Finally, the notion of academic hierarchy, as exemplified by the total control of SRV by Wolfensberger, is something to be challenged at all levels. A truly representative system of service delivery for people with disabilities must involve consultation with consumers at all levels of organisational management, including the process of developing a theoretical framework. The types of research and evaluation used in such a system must encompass qualitative as well as quantitative methods, and alternative interpretations of data must be encouraged. I am concerned that SRV is reaffirming the traditional power structures within the academic world, by affording such pre-eminence to Wolf Wolfensberger as a personality. I am also worried that quantitative methods of evaluation might become the norm in services, despite evidence that it is inappropriate in adequately assessing the ability of services to meet the needs of their consumers. The fact that qualitative data to measure the subjective well-being of consumers does not exist in Australia (Cummins 1993, 66) is indicative that my concerns are being borne out.

Conclusion

It would also be beneficial for Foundations and other SRV proponents to set limits on the applicability of this approach to services for people with intellectual disabilities. Specifically I refer to the process of deinstitutionalisation, to which SRV seems most appropriate and useful. It is less relevant and useful to those services which offer community support to consumers who have negotiated the level and nature of the support with the service. While such services must be attuned to the broader needs of people with intellectual disabilities - in the areas of living skills, employment etc.- they must also be flexible in their delivery of support to people who do not share the same aspirations as SRV proponents hold on their behalf.

I have covered a wide range of areas of criticism in this article and realise that I have left myself open to criticism in turn from the proponents of SRV. However, I would consider it an achievement to stimulate SRV affiliates to actually debate the theoretical underpinnings of their process, and to consider ways in which some of the anomalies - specifically with regard to the multicultural situation in Australia - can be overcome. This will necessarily involve a process whereby Wolf Wolfensberger is informed by those who work and have an interest in this service sector, which will make a refreshing change.

Acknowledgements

This article reflects the view of the author, and does not represent the view of the Uniting Church Board for Social Responsibility.
References available on request from NCID.

Note: see list of Conferences for details about 'Twenty-five Years of Normalisation, Social Role Valorisation (SRV) and Social Integration: A Retrospective and Prospective View'

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