

REVIEWS MORE

REDUCING UNWANTED RISK FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND FOR DISABILITY WORKERS. By BILL BUDISELIK. Paper presented at the 41st National Conference of the Australian Society for the Study of Intellectual Disability, Canberra, Australia, 2006.

Reviewed by Kevin Cocks

THIS ARTICLE IS A RESPONSE to a paper presented by Bill Budiselik at the September 2006 41st National Conference of the Australian Society for the Study of Intellectual Disability (ASSID). Budiselik titled his paper “*Reducing unwanted risk for people with disabilities and for disability workers.*” My critique is from an abridged version of the paper he presented at the conference.

Budiselik’s paper opens with a strategic question: “Can my organisation demonstrate it has reduced the risk of abuse and achieved protectiveness?” The author identifies two motives why human service organizations should try to reduce abuse, neglect, and harm, and provide protective environments for vulnerable consumers. He states that first there are obvious moral considerations, and second, a strong business case as well. Regarding the latter, he then identifies three more specific reasons:

1. There can be substantial legal and financial consequences for organizations and individuals found negligent if abuse or harm occurs;
2. How much the agency pays for insurance premiums might increase;
3. The agency can make a stronger case for more funding if it demonstrates good risk management practices.

The above reasons are sound and valid. The highest motivation for a serving entity should be driven by its concern for the dignity, welfare, safety, and lives of the people it serves. Particularly when they are reliant on having their fundamental

needs met through paid service providers, no one would argue against the need to protect people from abuse and neglect.

However, it appears that the motivation for reducing risk in the approach presented by Budiselik is driven primarily by the fear of substantial legal and financial consequences for human service organisations found guilty of allowing and perhaps covering up abuse and neglect of vulnerable persons in their care. This approach reflects the common decision-making framework in many human services, which is that service policy and service practice be ‘emotionally distanced’ from the service recipient. Moral reasons are acknowledged by Budiselik, but he does not elaborate on what needs to be considered from a moral point of view. His primary framework is a technical, managerial, and legal approach. This ignores the true nature of human services, runs counter to their origins, and distances itself from the very people it is reportedly trying to protect from abuse, neglect, and harm.

This ‘risk management’ approach is not the most relevant for human service delivery, and certainly not effective when it comes to protecting vulnerable people from abuse and neglect. At best, the approach may shuffle the deck of cards and on the surface give the appearance of concern or even reform that leads to greater protection. However, in reality, it pushes the perpetrators underground and thus increases the vulnerabilities of already vulnerable people, making it harder to protect them.

I believe the issue is a moral one—a question of what is right and wrong. Certainly one must recognize that organisations, to deal with the issue thoroughly, need to identify risk implications and institute technical, managerial, and legal approaches in response to identified abuse and neglect. A much higher order of thinking, though, beyond the level of these techniques, is required

to reduce risk of abuse and neglect for people with disabilities. I have several suggestions for how an organization or an individual could approach the higher perspective which I believe is the more protective one.

First, one must better understand the history of human service delivery, including especially in this regard how the dynamics of power, control, and violence get played out in human services.

Next, one must ask, "What makes an individual less prone to being abused and neglected?" I would answer for myself that, firstly, it is the people I have in my life, those whom I have freely-given relationships with, those people who would stand by and up for me if I were in a position where I was unable to do so for myself. Secondly, it is understanding my identity and who has defined my identity. For example, is my identity one of a valued citizen? Have I had the opportunity to evolve and develop my identity as a valued citizen, or is my identity one of a person devalued (Wolfensberger, 1998) by others who have authority and power over me?

Following are other fundamental questions that I believe need to be explored in developing an

organisational culture which protects vulnerable people from abuse and neglect:

- Does the organisation support and promote people in a way that gives dignity to the person with disability in every aspect of his/her life?
- Does the organisation have a culture of openness?¹
- Are vulnerable people with disabilities involved in all aspects of organisational decision-making processes?
- Is person-centred planning utilised when assisting a person to plan for his/her future?
- Are vulnerable people visible and known in a positive way in their communities?
- Does the organisation value its staff at the coalface of service delivery?
- Does the organisation have a charter of values?
- Does the organisation have guidelines on how to identify abuse and to respond to allegations of abuse?
- Is regular time set aside for staff and vulnerable people to discuss and reflect upon service design, practice, and philosophy?

The above list of questions is not exhaustive. However, it indicates an approach that addresses

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

ISSUES OF THE SRV JOURNAL occasionally include a section of double blind peer-reviewed articles. Full-length manuscripts on research, theory, or reviews of the literature relevant to Social Role Valorization (SRV) are invited. These articles, with no identifying information about the author(s), will be sent by the Editor to appropriate experts for review of academic merit and relevance to SRV theory and application. Reviewers will be drawn largely, but not exclusively, from the editorial board. It is anticipated that the review process will take two to three months, at which time the Editor will communicate directly with the lead author regarding the outcome of the review process. Manuscripts may be accepted as submitted, may be accepted contingent on revisions, or rejected for publication. The final decision as to whether or not an article is published rests with the Editor.

The average length for peer reviewed articles is 6000 words. Authors should submit articles as an email attachment. All identifying information about the author(s) should be included in the body of the email that accompanies the attachment, not on the attachment itself. If at all possible, articles should be submitted in Microsoft Word. They should be double-spaced and in 12 point Times New Roman font.

Articles should be sent to the attention of Marc Tumeinski, The SRV Journal, journal@srvip.org.

the moral obligation as a higher order approach to reducing abuse, neglect, and harm, and the need to provide protective environments for vulnerable people with disabilities. Whilst we continue to invest in and rely on technical, managerialist, and legal remedies to reduce abuse and neglect of vulnerable people and provide protective environments for them, we will continually fail to achieve this worthy goal.

The process of interaction between people with and without disability is a social exchange. The experience of people with disability is that they are often seen as recipients of charity. A more positive exchange would be for people with disabilities to be seen as social contributors. A person without a disability can also gain from a positive interaction by having an opportunity to engage with another person's experience of disability and, as a result, become more aware of his or her own humanity. Both lives can be enriched through a positive exchange.

We must institute a belief that all human beings are equally important, unique, and of intrinsic value. Everyone should be seen and valued as a whole person, first and foremost. Human beings are fundamentally social beings. We all need love and relationships, and to be part of a community (cf. Wolfensberger, Thomas, & Caruso, 1996). Everyone has the potential to learn, grow, and make a positive social contribution. Each of us has the capacity to contribute to the well being or to the harm of others. Some people intentionally do harmful, dangerous or life threatening things to others. Sometimes unintentional harm is done by well-meaning people. Others contribute positively to people's lives. Human well-being is dependent on belonging to a socially just community.

Beliefs and values are the core ingredients of organisational culture. If the beliefs and values of an organization are counter to the ones I am suggesting, then no matter what quality assurance systems are in place, vulnerable people will not be protected.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Readers interested in this topic may also wish to read* Pacey, S. (2008). What keeps people safe? An exploration of Australian historical roots & contemporary expressions of abuse. *The SRV Journal*, 3(1), 7–19.

ENDNOTE

1. A culture of managerialism and risk management/aversion lead to an organisational culture which: is closed, defensive, and secretive; and has a militarist hierarchy. An organisation with a culture of openness: is typified by communal management; has open access to the information or material resources needed for projects; is open to contributions from a diverse range of people who receive/produce/contribute to the service; and has flat hierarchies and a fluid organisational structure. Communal management is usually done with decisions made by some form of consensus decision-making or voting.

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QUALITY OF LIFE FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES. By R. SCHALOCK, J. GARDNER, & V. BRADLEY. Washington, D.C.: AAIDD, 200 pages, 2007.

Reviewed by David Race

THIS REVIEW WAS WRITTEN TO a backdrop of a debate in the author's country engendered by the passage through the two Houses of Parliament of the *Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill*, a revision to earlier legislation that sought to regulate the various scientific developments that the title of the bill implies. The major focus of the media concerned public exhortation by a number of Catholic bishops on an aspect of the bill permitting, in certain defined circumstances, the growth of human tissue in non-human eggs, with those in favour citing the advances in developing 'cures' for various impairments of genetic origin, and the bishops raising the 'Frankenstein monster' scenario, along with statements about the value of all human life. Buried in the parliamentary debate was an attempt at an amendment to the legal time limit for abortion of a foetus deemed to be 'severely disabled,' which currently is right up to term. This amendment, proposed in the House of Lords, was to reduce the time limit to that for all other abortions, and was defeated after a debate in which one of those opposing the amendment opined that certain disabled people were "not viable people" (Hansard, House of Lords debate, 28 January 2008).

This view of disability was discovered to be still common in an examination of intellectual disability services in seven countries (Race, 2007), including the setting for the book under review. The notion, therefore, of 'Quality of Life' (QOL hereafter, following the book's convention) for a group that seem to have an increasingly lower chance of being born struck a somewhat ironic cord. For readers of this journal, too, an initial inspection of the references and index of the book leave a sense of omission of reference to those from the

SRV field and its offshoots. In particular, reference to a forerunner of the book (Goode, 1994), with a similar title, although published only 13 years before this current volume, was noticeable for its absence, despite a number of historical developments being outlined by Schalock and colleagues. Even if Wolfensberger's contribution to that earlier edited collection, entitled "Let's hang up 'quality of life' as a hopeless term" might have deterred the current authors, Wolfensberger's views were significant for their minority status.

So this reviewer came to the detailed reading of this book with limited enthusiasm, reinforced by the somewhat repetitive nature of the various summaries that preceded and ended the sections and chapters. Getting into the detail, however, the feeling that a more nuanced approach to the book was called for began to grow. Clearly reflecting the significant place of QOL measures and influence on policy and practice in the US, the authors set out their primary readership as being "providers and policy makers," though they then list other groups who may find the book of interest. As an outside academic, with some knowledge of the Byzantine nature of the US service system, these initial objectives suggested that there might be too much 'local knowledge' needed, if such outsiders were to be able to find the book useful. Again, however, on full reading, it seemed to be a lesson, if a rather exhaustive one, in discovering that you have spent a lot of time trying to find a detailed, and quantifiable, answer to a simple question, but have found that, like many such questions, there is a complicated, elusive, and essentially qualitative answer.

This initial analysis may seem at odds with the general tone and presentation of the book, which conveys messages of empirical rigour and academic and professional respectability, including of course the image of its publishers, at least to outsiders, as the intellectual disability service empire writ large. Indeed, such thoughts would be confirmed by the early chapters, on 'The Individual Perspective' on QOL. Extensive compara-

tive listings of the various 'objective measures' of QOL are given, along with the acknowledged tension between such objectivity and the increasing use of self-reported assessments of well-being, in the domains of QOL commonly in use. The need to have QOL measures that meet 'psychometric standards' is a constant refrain, as is a sense that the development of QOL measures represents a reaction to service system (and academic) market forces, rather than being focussed on making lives better for people. A telling statement by the authors (p. 26) that the "criteria for selecting quality indicators ... reflect the concerns of program managers, but also recognise that people are *as important as programs*" (reviewer's emphasis added) seems to support this feeling.

People keep creeping in, however, to the forest of tables and psychometric fog. The 'domains' that emerge from the various measures bear a striking resemblance to the decidedly non-psychometric listing of the 'good things of life' (Wolfensberger et al., 1996), achievement of which, of course, is widely taught as the primary goal of SRV. Here, and subsequently, the feeling of the emperor's foundation garments being more importantly on show than the mysterious topcoat of elaborate psychometric measures grows stronger. In fact, as the authors get into the second and third sections, headed 'The Organizational Perspective' and 'The Systems Perspective,' the thought emerges that a substitution of the words 'good things of life' for 'quality of life' would not affect the analysis of how to implement change at organizational and systemic levels.

The difference seems to be that, by talking the language of empiricism, quantitative and 'objective' measures, the changes can at least get a foot in the emperor's door, if only at the tradesmen's entrance. The use of classic 'management of change' literature for the organizational section, and systems theory, for the systems section, are entirely appropriate and interesting, but do not appear to this reviewer to be dependent on QOL issues for their success. Indeed, in the references to 'learning

organizations' in the former section, and the diagrammatic representation of the systemic change, a sense of *déjà vu* was felt, eventually traced back to two pieces of work by John O'Brien and others, one and two decades ago. These were *Celebrating the Ordinary*, subtitled *The Emergence of Options in Community Living as a Thoughtful Organization* (O'Brien et al., 1998) and the diagrams in the (unpublished) handbook for O'Brien's *Framework for Accomplishment* workshops in the late 1980s, though a number of other outputs from this source could also be brought to mind. The point is that they were not dependent on QOL or QOL measures for their success.

The last section, then, appears to this reviewer to be the point where the authors themselves realise which clothes are more important, or perhaps that changes in emperor and how the empire is run are more important than what clothes he wears. They call on their readers (who, it will be recalled, are primarily program managers and policy makers) to undergo a change in their "mental model or mindset" (p. 168). This includes, for example, changes in service organizations' behaviour which represent:

- Shifting from organization-based programs to community-based support systems;
- Changing from organizations as primary service providers to organizations as bridges to the community;
- Emphasising the critical role that direct support professionals play in enhancing personal outcomes (p. 174).

Readers of this journal may be tempted to the reaction 'you don't say,' as they reflect on their efforts on these lines over at least two decades, but if the authors' view that such changes are an inevitable result of the 'quality revolution,' and their status in the empire is such that the changes happen, then those same readers might say 'so be it.'

From a distance, therefore, this reviewer's perception is that the ideas, writers and policy makers that pushed concern for QOL measures to the forefront at the organization and systems level are more universal than just this narrow notion of

QOL affords. The forces of neo-liberal economics and managerialism were as much in evidence in the study of seven countries referred to earlier as the low chances of certain disabled groups being born. It therefore seems to be a matter of debate whether QOL measures are a way of deflecting change (or restricting potential change makers to those in the guild of psychometric tailors) or whether there can be a realisation of what the authors describe (p. 168) as an “emerging movement” for people to be “*both in and of the community*” (emphasis in original).

Ultimately, the initial foreboding described at the start of this review was transformed into a hope. This hope is that Schalock and his colleagues had, by the end of the book, echoed T.S. Eliot’s words regarding a rather broader concept of the meaning of life than QOL:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

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COMMUNITY-BASED ART STUDIOS IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY. By R.M. VICK & K. SEXTON-RADEK. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 25(1), 4-10, 2008.

Reviewed by Susan Thomas

WHILE I AM NOT FAMILIAR with the art therapy literature, I would not be surprised if this were one of a minority of items in that literature that reference normalization and Social Role Valorization (pp. 4, 5, and 9), and that identify the medical- and sickness-imaging that come with the ideas of art as therapy. The authors sent a questionnaire to 22 “community-based, therapeutic art studio programs” (p. 5), 12 in Europe and 10 in the US, and compared their answers. (We are not told how many items were in the questionnaire, only that it included questions on mission statements, funding, participants, staff functions, range of services provided, and that the survey was done by email.) The survey followed a visit to a number of such programs in Europe by the first author. Fifteen completed surveys were returned, and from these, the authors tried to identify similarities and differences among the programs, focusing especially on comparisons between the two continents. In the European sample, there was much more emphasis on the art studio as similar to generic art galleries, and the participants in these studios as artists, whereas the US programs studied had much more of a “social service” emphasis—in SRV language, this would be phrased that the European programs were closer to the culturally valued analogue of art studios, ateliers, and galleries than the US programs.

Interestingly, the authors report that during the first author's European trip, almost all the studios he visited proclaimed, "We do not do art therapy!" (p. 4).

The differences were illustrated by the language used by the US versus the European programs, the names given to staff roles and the functions they were expected to carry out, and the differences in the stated purpose of the programs. For example, the US programs tended to use such staff terms as 'art therapist,' 'therapist,' 'wellness staff,' and 'group leader'—all terms implying a human service—while the names for staff for the European programs (translated into English) included 'art teacher,' 'artistic leader,' 'gallerist,' and 'manager.' And while all the programs tended to engage in some similar activities—the production of art by individuals and groups, holding exhibitions and having in-house art sales—there were also some significant differences in activities. For instance, more of the European programs held sales of participants' art in commercial galleries, and maintained a permanent collection of the art produced, whereas more of the American programs provided art and other 'therapy' and counseling.

Without using the term, the article repeatedly underlined a big problem of what in Social Role Valorization (SRV) is called model incoherency (Wolfensberger, 1998, pp. 111-118), meaning a mix of elements of a program that is not harmonious, that conveys multiple and conflicting messages, and that is not concordant with culturally valued analogues (Wolfensberger & Thomas, 2007, p. 30). For instance, many of the surveyed programs accepted anyone as a participant, whereas in 'real' art studios, a prospective artist would have to submit a portfolio of work, and have it judged. Similarly, many programs did not reveal the artist's name when a work was shown, in order to 'protect client confidentiality'—which of course is not how art is shown in the real art world. And sale of the work produced was beset by considerations of conflict of interest and professional art therapist ethics, which prohibit making a profit from

the clients' work; but of course, a gallery manager, exhibitor, or agent for a 'real artist' would make a percentage on the sale of an artist's work, and the artist would earn something himself. Also, art therapy programs have historically been used for the purpose of 'diagnosis' of a client's problems or 'pathologies,' which is not the case in the real art world; and when the making of the art is valued primarily as a form of self-expression and the building of self-esteem, then how the eventual art product looks is minimized by art therapists—but in the real art world, how the art looks makes a big difference in whether there is an audience for it, how much it will bring at sale, etc.

All this raises a number of Social Role Valorization-relevant questions.

1. Are even studio-based art-as-therapy programs primarily therapy, or primarily the production of art? This has major implications to the proper culturally valued analogue for the program.

2. Are the participants in the program primarily in the roles of clients or service recipients, or are they in the role of artists; and if the latter, are they to be hobbyists or professional (i.e., career) artists? This itself raises questions about whether the impaired clients/artists will be able to make a living at it, since successful artists are few, and many have to earn their living doing something else. So exactly what roles should such programs try to cultivate for their participants?

3. If the programs are really about real art and the real role of artists, then should they not rid themselves of therapy and service concepts, imagery, and language?

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THE COUNTERFEITERS. By STEFAN RUZOWITZKY (Director). 98 minutes, 2007.

Reviewed by Susan Thomas

THIS GERMAN FILM, called *Die Fälscher* in the original, is based on the book *Die Teufel Werkstatt (The Devil's Workshop)*, and tells the story of Operation Bernhard, a counterfeiting operation run by the Nazis out of the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen. It is said to have been the biggest counterfeiting operation in history. While the basic story of the film is true—there was a Nazi counterfeiting operation run in the camp by inmates—it is not clear how many of the details in the film are true.

The outline of the story is this: Salomon (Sally) Sorowitsch, reputed to be Germany's best counterfeiter, and Jewish, was arrested and sent to the camp at Mauthausen in 1936. He had been trained as an artist, but preferred counterfeiting because he made much more money at it. At Mauthausen, starving, he sketched one of the guards, and because this picture was so well done, the guards recruited him to draw other portraits—and fed him well for it—and to paint murals on the camp walls. In 1941, he was transferred to Sachsenhausen, where the Nazis had established a full-time counterfeiting operation (Operation Bernhard), using the camp inmates to run it. Sorowitsch was ap-

parently transferred there since he had the reputation of being the best counterfeiter, and the Nazis wanted him to be in charge of 'quality control' as they attempted to counterfeit first the British pound, and then the US dollar.

For over four years (till the liberation of the camps in 1945), they made and printed counterfeit money. The film reports that the Nazis made and fed into the world economy £132 million in fake notes, which was four times the amount the British government then had in reserve. The counterfeiting of the dollar was only accomplished late (early in 1945), because of sabotage by one of the inmate-counterfeiters who did not want to aid the Nazis, even though he knew that if they failed to produce the dollar, all the counterfeiters would be killed. In the chaos at the camps when the Nazis fled, and before the Allies arrived, Sorowitsch collected a huge amount of counterfeit dollars, which he then took with him to Monte Carlo. After using it to win lots of money at the casinos there, he then intentionally gambled it all away—feeding all the counterfeit into the coffers of the gambling casino.

While it may seem strange to examine the massive evil of the Nazi death camps from an SRV perspective, the film actually contained some SRV lessons.

First, obviously, the Jews and the political prisoners who ended up in the camps were so devalued as to be seen and treated as literally subhuman—"dirt," one guard calls them—and to merit only unremitting labor and death. People who in ordinary life had filled positively valued roles nonetheless became deeply devalued because of the negative imagery that was incessantly spread about them, e.g., that they were a danger to the nation, that they were vermin, etc. Thus, they were deprived of many of their valued roles (such as professional worker roles) and were congregated into ghettos and camps.

However, at the same time, these now severely devalued people possessed the competencies that had been required to carry out their earlier roles, and it was these role-tied competencies that saved

those inmates who participated in Operation Bernhard. For instance, the inmates who were selected to be part of the operation were printers, artists, engravers, and people from banking and finance—and of course the known counterfeiter Sorowitsch. If they had not occupied these roles, and possessed the competencies that enabled them to carry out the roles, they would not have been chosen to make the counterfeit bills—and they would have been subjected to the horrid conditions of the labor camp, or gassed to death.

In fact, one of the workers in the project had not been a printer, but had lied and said he was in order to escape being sent to Sobibor camp. When his incompetence was discovered (because the bills he made were of such low quality), Sorowitsch lied for him to enable him to continue working in the relatively cushy conditions of the counterfeiting operation. Thus, their roles, and the perceived competencies that went with those roles, enabled them to get at least the ‘less worse’ things of life for a period of a few years, from those who were in a position to give or withhold them. The counterfeiters were given clean and soft beds to sleep in (albeit in a dorm-type barracks), more food than the other inmates, cigarettes, and they even had a doctor to attend to their medical problems. As one man put it, as long as they could produce the bills, they would be kept alive.

Of course, this operation took place during a war, and was carried out at a concentration camp, so the men were always in danger. For instance, if they became too sick to be a useful worker, they could be shot. And in any case, they expected that at the end of either the war or of the operation, the Nazis would kill them all.

Note too that not all their roles which made them **valuable** to the Nazis had been **valued**. For instance, Sorowitsch was a convicted criminal, and a counterfeiter—roles that are usually not highly valued ones. Engraving, and being able to draw and paint, are ordinarily valued competencies, but putting these skills to use in order to make counterfeit money is usually not valued, but was

valued within this unique and temporary subculture. The competencies tied to their previous roles became so desired—so positively valued—as to override their severe devaluation, at least temporarily and to a degree.

At least one of Sorowitsch’s fellow workers in Operation Bernhard, a former banker, greatly resented that he had to work with (and under) this convicted criminal. So a person who had once held a valued role did not like being valued for the same reason—namely, possession of a certain set of skills—as a person who had previously held a devalued role. In fact, the one who had previously held a devalued role became even more valued than the others because of his consummate skills, and was given the highest supervisory position over all the other workers.

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COLD STORAGE: SUPER MAXIMUM SECURITY CONFINEMENT IN INDIANA. By HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (www.hrw.org), New York, Washington, London, Brussels, 83 pages, 1997.

Reviewed by Joe Osburn

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (HRW) is a 30 year-old nongovernmental organization (NGO) that investigates and publishes human rights abuses around the world, believing that such exposure will end, lessen, or prevent them. Its interests range globally from Afghanistan to Zambia, and across an array of imaginable ways to abuse the rights and dignity of human beings, from beating children in schools to selling them into sex-slavery. (One

notable exception to the latter array is the abuse suffered by aborted human babies: to the contrary, HRW considers it to be an abuse of the rights of women that convenient access to abortion is lacking in some parts of the world.) HRW communicates its findings through the popular media, its own regular news reports, and an extensive publications enterprise which prints numerous documents, of anywhere from article to book size, that treat issues in more depth.

HRW has long been interested in instances and conditions of rights abuses that occur in prisons, which are both prime venues and instruments of abuse in many societies. In the US, HRW has issued several reports on human rights violations in what are called “super maximum security facilities,” or “supermaxes” for short. The first such report was the above 1997 monograph.¹ It is both well-written and well-documented, with more than 160 footnotes in its 80+ pages. It provides an overview of the development of “supermax” prisons as either stand-alone facilities or self-contained units of larger prisons, and notes that there were 57 such state and federal prisons in the

US, including the two in Indiana which are the subject of this booklet. These were the Maximum Control Facility (MCF) in Westville, Indiana and the Secure Housing Unit (SHU) in Carlisle, Indiana. It also describes the physical layouts of these settings, the inmate populations, what a typical day is like for prisoners, the forms of control and abuse of prisoners, and the impact of these conditions on prisoners. It offers 25 recommendations for addressing the abuses it found.

The idea behind super-maximum security prisons is a simple one: “... the segregation of dangerous inmates allows inmates in other facilities to serve their time with less fear of assault; the extreme limitations on inmates’ freedom in such facilities protects both staff and inmates; and the harshness of supermax conditions is believed to deter other prisoners from committing acts that might result in their transfer there” (pp. 19-20). The notorious Alcatraz prison established in 1934 to incarcerate “the nation’s most desperate criminals and the federal prison system’s worst troublemakers” (p. 17) was, in effect, the first US super-maximum security prison. It was closed in 1963, but pro-

A NOTE ON THE WORD ‘STATUS’

DESCRIPTIONS OF social devaluation, role theory, and Social Role Valorization typically incorporate the phenomenon of social status, both devalued and valued. The concept of status is mentioned throughout Wolfensberger’s monograph on SRV. “It is the people who embody the opposite of what a society values who will be cast into devalued status” (Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 7).

The word ‘status’ means a position of standing in society, in a profession, and so on. It comes from the Latin verb *stare*, which means to stand.

The phenomenon of social status is intertwined with that of social roles. “A social role may be viewed as a combination of behaviors, functions, relationships, privileges, duties, and responsibilities that is socially defined, is widely understood and recognized within a society, and is characteristic or expected of a person who occupies a particular **position** within a social system” (Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 25; emphasis added). Ralph Linton in his book *The Study of Man* (1936) wrote “There are no roles without statuses or statuses without roles.”

A related word is ‘statusful,’ which means something that has or confers higher social status. A related colloquial word is ‘statusy,’ which refers to possessing, indicating or imparting a high status.

[Source information primarily from the Oxford English Dictionary.]

vided the model for making the Marion (Illinois) federal penitentiary the country's highest security prison in 1978. Following a week-long riot there in 1983, in which two guards and an inmate were killed and many others injured, Marion went on 'lock down,' confining inmates to their cells 23 hours a day. This approach was so successful in reducing violence that it became the prototype for modern super-maximum security prisons: authorities in nearly every other state instituted the Marion model of extreme confinement, control, and surveillance in their own jurisdictions, spurring a super-maximum security prison construction boom in the 1980s and 1990s.

This means that everywhere in the country in both federal and state prison systems, "dangerous or disruptive prisoners are removed from the general population and housed in conditions of extreme social isolation, limited environmental stimulation, reduced privileges and services, scant recreational, vocational or educational opportunities, and extraordinary control over their movement" (p. 18). Some prisoners in super-maximum security facilities have been in this form of solitary confinement—what prisoners call "electronic zoos" and "high-tech cages"—for decades. (For example, see Eligon, 2008.) These terms are horribly apt characterizations of the constant scrutiny and control prisoners experience literally every second of their lives, but they do not capture the virtually total social isolation imposed on them, a degree of segregation more extreme than even that of caged zoo animals.

"The most striking thing about the cells at the MCF is their imposing doors. Made of solid steel, interrupted only by a small, approximately eye-level clear window and waist-level food slot, they effectively cut inmates off from the world outside the cell, muffling sound and severely restricting visual stimulus ... Each rectangular MCF cell measures twelve feet ten inches by five feet eleven inches and has a concrete ceiling, walls and floor. Its main furnishing is a poured concrete bed ... At one end of the bed ... is a rudimentary concrete

desk; to use it, the inmate must sit on the bed, where he lacks back support. Above the desk is an extremely narrow window, like those used for cross-bows in medieval castles: impossible for a person to fit through. Next to the bed ... is a stainless steel combination toilet and sink ... MCF cells have fluorescent lighting and stark walls, painted ivory ... inmates may turn off one light and darken the cell somewhat, but a seven-watt fluorescent bulb stays on 24 hours a day" (pp. 24-25).

The indoor and outdoor "recreational areas" are equally void and constricting. Prisoners describe them as "oversized cells" or "dog runs." "Outdoor recreation areas merit their name only to the extent that being outdoors is defined by a narrow view of the sky and a breath of fresh air. Standing in the outdoor area is akin to being at the bottom of a well" (p. 27). Recreation is often cancelled for reasons of punishment or weather. The prisoners' days consist of "unremitting idleness." They are allowed material possessions of only very constricted types and amounts. For example, prisoners in the SHU "were only allowed to keep the flexible inner cartridge of ballpoint pens; their hard plastic shell was confiscated for security reasons" (p. 26).

One big issue with HRW is that a large proportion of prisoners in both the SHU and MCF (and in all other super-maximum security facilities) is seriously mentally ill. SHU personnel estimate that as many as two-thirds of the inmates fall into this category. Diagnoses include schizophrenia, delusional disorders, schizoaffective disorders, bipolar disorders, major depressive disorders, and other unspecified psychotic disorders. "These illnesses are not manifested in subtle symptoms apparent only to the discerning professional: these prisoners rub feces on themselves, stick pencils in their penises, stuff their eyelids with toilet paper, bite chunks of flesh from their bodies, slash themselves, hallucinate, rant and rave or stare fixedly at the walls" (p. 34). Under conditions of such extreme mental duress, even the strongest and healthiest individuals often crack. It is no wonder then that those with already wounded psyches

would be most likely to fall to pieces. Many mentally impaired people end up in prisons, where their symptoms are exacerbated by the regime of life there, which most can neither understand nor tolerate, their mental health further deteriorates, and at some point sooner or later, the most mentally impaired people end up in super-maximum security facilities because of the behaviors they emit in response to the conditions imposed on them. It is a vicious spiral downward. On top of this, these facilities have neither the means nor the will to provide treatment to mentally ill prisoners. When such prisoners act out, guards charged with controlling them have recourse only to force, which quickly ratchets up to violence. "In a statement released to the public, one SHU inmate asserted that another inmate: 'had been beaten repeatedly by the guards here. The man obviously had some psychological problems because he defecates and rubs the feces all over his body. The guards think it is funny and continue to harass him daily' " (p. 35).

What does all this have to do with Social Role Valorization (SRV)?

Well, a good deal actually, far too much to expound here, so I will mention only four major points of relevance. **First** of all it is helpful to keep in mind that SRV is formulated to improve the lives of individuals, groups, and entire classes of people, especially those who are societally devalued. As such, SRV has extensive applicability to prisoners, and perhaps even most especially to "the worst of the worst," as those in super-maximum security prisons are labeled (p. 47).

Even within confinement, much could conceivably be done to valorize the roles (and potential roles) of prisoners, perhaps most especially in the very broad area of competency enhancement: the acquisition and honing of practically all kinds of skills and abilities, the development of vocational interests, the nurturing and increasing of bodily, mental, spiritual, and intellectual capacities, the enhancement of social and relationship competencies, and more, not to

mention all conceivable ways to enhance the image of these deeply stigmatized people. (For more detailed explanations of the applicability of SRV to imprisoned people, see Williams, 1999, and Wolfensberger, 1999.)

Second, in SRV training, we teach about human service models, especially the 'developmental model,' with all of its positive assumptions about human beings and their potentials, and about the major implications for nurturing growth and fulfillment in people. We briefly mention as well that there are other human service models besides the developmental model. One of these other models we call 'menace-detentive.' Super-maximum security facilities are perhaps the ultimate manifestation of the menace-detentive model. In fact, the detention and extreme control over the lives of people perceived as being the most menacing in our society is the very reason why these settings exist.

Third, Social Role Valorization incorporates the powerfully important concept of "model coherency" (Wolfensberger, 1993), which briefly says that a service model is coherent to the extent that all four of its major elements blend together harmoniously to address the needs of the service recipients. Thus: (a) the assumptions and beliefs that underlie a service (the first model element), including what is believed about the people served and what ought to be done to, with, or for them; (b) should be consistent with the people it serves (the second model element); (c) the service content (the third model element), i.e., what it provides, should match both its fundamental assumptions and the perceived needs of the people served; and (d) the service should use processes (the fourth model element), i.e., methods and technologies, settings, groupings, service workers, and language, that match the service content.

A service model can be highly coherent or incoherent. Coherent service models are almost always very powerful. And, a highly coherent service model can be powerfully adaptive or powerfully destructive, depending upon whether it is based on positive or negative assumptions. Super-maxi-

super-maximum security prisons are highly destructively coherent: what they do (the third model element) to the people they 'serve' (the second model element) and how they do it (the fourth model element) perfectly match what they think and believe (the first model element). We also teach in SRV that human services reflect their society, particularly its values. Thus, the operational assumptions of super-maximum security prisons mirror those of major sectors or our society. "Some people in the United States believe that prisoners, especially those who have committed acts of violence while in prison, have forfeited their rights and deserve to be treated, as one Texan warden declared bluntly, 'like animals' ... Besides evidencing little respect for human dignity, such views are also unwise. Most inmates in super-maximum security prisons will one day be released back into local communities. If these people have been abused, treated with violence, and confined in dehumanizing conditions that threaten their very mental health, they may well leave prison angry, dangerous, and far less capable of leading law-abiding lives than when they entered" (p. 2).

Fourth, in SRV training and literature, we are careful to point out two key general facts or caveats about SRV. One is that SRV is a social science concept in the empirical realm; it provides excellent guidance to those who want to help people grow and develop, be better thought of by others, and experience the good things in life (Wolfensberger, Thomas, & Caruso, 1996). The other is that decisions about whether and how to use SRV are determined by people's higher-order beliefs, which are above or outside of SRV (see, for example, Osburn, 2006). An implication of the latter is that SRV could be used by people for either beneficent or pernicious ends. If someone wanted to further impair, devalue, wound, ruin, or destroy another party, then SRV offers guidance on how to do it systematically and comprehensively; they would simply have to invert all SRV assumptions, principles, and strategies, and employ what might be called 'anti-Social Role Valorization.' In

effect, this is what super-maximum security prisons have done. However, it is almost certain that few, if any, of those responsible for these facilities have ever heard of SRV. "The confinement of persons who are mentally ill in these facilities is particularly reprehensible. In Indiana, as throughout the United States, increasing numbers of mentally ill people are ending up in prisons that are not equipped to meet their mental health needs. Mentally ill people often have difficulty complying with rules, especially in prison settings where the rules are very restrictive and the stresses are intense. Many are aggressive or disruptive and, as a result, accumulate disciplinary records that land them in segregated confinement in super-maximum security facilities ... For some mentally ill inmates, confinement in super-maximum security conditions is a horror" (p. 11).

The recommendations proffered by HRW are well-matched to its analysis of the problem. They include both legislative and administrative suggestions, i.e., "The Indiana Legislature should ..."; "The Department of Correction should ...". The two main recommendations are that mentally ill prisoners should be kept out of such facilities, and that the harsh conditions for other prisoners in them should be lessened. In contrast to some types of service assessments which offer recommendations that are either too general or low-level, HRW's recommendations for addressing the problems it found in these prisons are almost as incisive as its analysis of the problem, with one major exception, which to my mind is the most noticeable weakness of this monograph.

As sensible and necessary as its analysis and recommendations are, HRW does not adequately address the most essential requirement for bringing about change in the situation, which is a reversal of the mentality from which these settings flow. They are a near-perfect actualization of the desire to lock up such people, throw away the key, and cause them to suffer. They express not ambivalence, but vengeance. In SRV, the power of mind-sets and expectancies is a fundamental

concept: what people hold in their minds about others determines how they treat them. Short of a widespread change in the negative attitudes many or most people harbor toward despised criminals, super-maximum security prisons will continue to exist and to be constructed. In fairness, mapping out how such social change might be brought about would have made this monograph much longer, possibly even a book; however, it probably would not be beyond the purview of HRW itself to offer advice about this in some other way. For instance, what, if anything beyond simple exposure of the facts, would incentive the Indiana legislature or administration to do what HRW says they should do? Or, why not recommend that a small 'project' built on positive assumptions about prisoners be undertaken to demonstrate the more humane and socially contributive possibilities? Yet, despite this weakness, this is a worthwhile and informative document which anyone interested in the plight of the imprisoned should read.

As a sort of postscript to this review, I had contacted HRW requesting its assessment of the impact of this and other related documents on practices in super-maximum security prisons, but have not (yet) heard back from it.

ENDNOTE

1. More recent HRW reports on super-maximum security confinement include *Out of Sight: Super-Maximum Security Confinement in the US*, and *U.S.: Red Onion State Prison: Super-Maximum Security Confinement in Virginia*.

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LITTLE PEOPLE BIG WORLD. By THE LEARNING CHANNEL. Television series (season 5, aired March 2008).

Reviewed by Susan Dewick

Introduction

MYRIAD MESSAGES FROM print, visual, and auditory text surround us daily. Some reinforce our stereotypes, expectancies, and negative assumptions of the socially devalued. Others make us reflect on and change our perceptions because of the way the party (an individual or group) is portrayed. These portrayals are created by imagery that influences our perceptions. Images can become a major factor in the formation of social judgments about the roles a devalued party may fill.

In this paper, I examine the portrayal of individuals with dwarfism (achondroplasia and dia-

strophic displasia) as seen on a television series on The Learning Channel (TLC). Are these portrayals different from depictions of people with dwarfism in film and on television in the past? I provide a brief overview of the reality show series, *little people BIG WORLD*, which explores the lives of the Roloff family. Both parents (Matt and Amy) and one of their four children (Zach) have the disproportionate type (achondroplasia) of dwarfism. Matt also has diastrophic displasia, which affects the joints and cartilage and makes it difficult for him to walk. I will present a synopsis of the two specific episodes analyzed.

Other questions I have considered about this particular television show include: Are these portrayals to be considered solely entertainment or can they be watched to help raise awareness and therefore contribute to deviancy unmaking? Is social devaluation occurring despite attempts at valorization? Are attempts at role valorization made because of moral considerations (as the right thing to do) or because of political correctness? Is intent even an issue? (I do not imply that the producers of the show are consciously trying to apply SRV.) If the intent of the program is not connected to the conscious valorization of the social roles of Matt, Amy, and Zach, does it still accomplish this valorization successfully because of the impact on the viewer?

Social Role Valorization Themes

RELATED TO SOCIAL ROLE VALORIZATION, W. Wolfensberger identifies ten themes, empirical realities and scientific evidence that “play a crucial role in helping people to understand wounding, deviancy-making, [and] role degradation” (1998, p. 103). Wolfensberger believes that by learning about these themes the observer will be able to analyze what is happening to a specific party and determine the best course of action to prevent or respond to situations of social devaluation. Social Role Valorization (SRV) is an active system used to “address the plight of people who are devalued by others” (Wolfensberger, 2000, p. 105). SRV

can be broken down into specific approaches that incorporate these ten themes.

In the context of this analysis, my focus is on the SRV themes of:

- 1) unconsciousness and consciousness raising [making people more aware of their thinking and perceptions];
- 2) role-expectancy and the connection to deviancy-(un)making [the characteristics and abilities assigned to specific individuals in specific roles, including individuals seen in historically deviant roles];
- 3) interpersonal identification [seeing ourselves in those who are devalued, e.g., by focusing on the things we have in common rather than the differences];
- 4) compensation for devalued status [by showing the party in the most valued role possible. This is Wolfensberger’s conservatism corollary, “the concept of positive compensation for devalued status” (1998, pp.124-127)]; and
- 5) social imagery [by changing perceptions about a party in areas such as physical setting, groupings with other people, personal imagery, language, and activities and time use, then responses and behaviors towards that person will change].

A Brief Historical Overview of the Portrayal of ‘Dwarves’ in Film & on Television

THIS IS NOT A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW of all the film or television texts that have been created where those with dwarfism have had a role, yet a look at what specific deviancy roles have been reinforced over time will help determine if *little people BIG WORLD* is a positive evolution. Even when a portrayal emphasizes positive characteristics associated with the valued role of the hero, as in *Willow* (1988, Ron Howard), *Simon Birch* (1998, Mark Steven Johnson) or *The Lord of the Rings* (2001, Peter Jackson), there are often many aspects of social devaluation still evident. The question I want to answer is whether any of these negative roles are evident in *little people BIG WORLD*: Is Matt, or Amy, or Zach, ever presented in this way?

Historical Deviancy-making Roles

THE PORTRAYAL OF PEOPLE with dwarfism in film is largely divided into a number of limited deviancy roles in specific genres of film. Fantasy, science fiction, horror, and the circus film are the prevalent genres in which people with dwarfism appear. The roles include 'the child,' the 'non-human,' the 'menace,' and the 'object of ridicule.' There also are many 'servant' roles in which status in relationship to the main character is devalued.

The child role. Portrayals include the childhood classics *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937, Walt Disney), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939, Victor Fleming) and *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971, Matt Stuart). Characters are seen in clothing not associated with adults and are given singing parts and comedy roles. They are also subservient to the main character, who is of 'normal' stature. The protagonists are often seen protecting the 'dwarf' character(s) from threat.

The non-human role. Actors with dwarfism are often hired to portray creatures, thereby associating shorter stature with animal or alien characteristics. An example would be the Ewoks in *The Ewok Adventure* (1984, John Korty). This also includes robot roles, as in the Star Wars trilogies (e.g. *Episode IV: A New Hope*, 1977, George Lucas).

The menace. On a recent episode of *The Wizards of Waverley Place* (2008, Disney), the threatening killer in a horror movie, even though purposefully stereotyped, is a person with dwarfism who wears a grotesque mask, carries a weapon (albeit a hair dryer) and hunts down the main characters. The association of the dwarf as someone to fear reinforces our negative responses and justifies any violent behavior as being protective.

The object of ridicule. If you make a circus film, it seems obligatory that a 'dwarf' is included as one of the performers. This may be historically valid, given time periods when there were very limited jobs available for people with dwarfism, yet it illustrates a freak show mentality, where we accept the existence and actions of people with dwarfism as entertainment. The film *Roustabout*

(1964, John Rich), in which Elvis joins a carnival, likely had widespread debilitating effects upon the perceptions of the capabilities of people with dwarfism, because of the numbers of people that saw the film.

The servant. The lower social status associated with servants is reinforced when the servant is a devalued person. This often leads to the party becoming an object of ridicule, as in the case of Tattoo in *Fantasy Island* (1978-1984, Aaron Spelling). The actor, Herve Villechaize, became a victim of self-parody with his repetition of the catchphrase, "De plane! De plane!" The Mini Me character in the Austin Powers movies (*International Man of Mystery*, 1997 and *Goldmember*, 2002, Jay Roach), doesn't even warrant his own name or personality.

Overview of the Series & Synopsis of Episodes

THE WEEKLY TLC TELEVISION SERIES *little people BIG WORLD* depicts the everyday lives of the Roloff family—Matt, the father; Amy, the mother; Jeremy and Zach, twin teenage sons; Molly, the younger daughter; and Jake, the youngest son. The focus of the series is on the daily routines and ins and outs of family life. Each episode tends to focus on an issue that Matt, Amy, or Zach is experiencing. As these three seek to find a way to adjust to the expectations of the typical world about work, play, and family activities, the viewers are witnesses to obstacles they must overcome and the strategies they have used to become successful participants. Of particular interest is how the parents attempt to help Zach find his place in the world, as he looks ahead to his own future. In conjunction with the series is the website at tlc.com that provides personal profiles, Matt's chats, Zach's soccer facts, and games and puzzles.

The subjects of previous episodes have included: family vacations; Matt's establishment of his own business; Matt and Zach attending an annual convention for Little People; Amy coaching Jake's soccer team; the relationship between Jeremy and

Zach as twins; Zach's hospitalization to replace his shunt; and background to Matt's and Amy's lives, including how they met and married. The youngest children, Jake and Molly, are rarely featured as the focus of an episode.

Two episodes (viewed on July 6, 2008) take the viewers into the courtroom as Matt is tried for driving under the influence of alcohol. They detail the family's responses as the trial is conducted over a four-day period. Questions of whether Matt is guilty or innocent are raised and examined. The family's reactions to the proceedings and to the verdict—acquittal by the judge based on lack of evidence beyond a reasonable doubt of guilt—are also explored.

Analysis: What is the Portrayal? Is Social Devaluation Perpetuated?

THE POTENTIAL OF THE SERIES to enhance the image of people with dwarfism is dependent upon the producers' decisions about what is shown. The issue of social devaluation is addressed by the very existence of the show. On the one hand, the voice-overs and on-screen interviews with the family members are successful overall at portraying the Roloffs in valued roles. As a consultant for the show, Matt Roloff's advocacy role is reinforced; viewers know that he is the former president of Little People of America (tlc.com, 2008) and is still active in the organization. Yet there are problematic issues when some of the actual images shown, in juxtaposition to the words being said and the competencies being highlighted, are confusing or contradictory.

Unconscious Perceptions

The trial episodes raise consciousness of our perceptions and how they are formed. The arresting officer is compelled, through questioning, to examine his reasoning behind the judgment call he made in arresting Matt for driving under the influence. The officer began to realize that his decision may have been made based more on a response to Matt's obvious dwarfism rather than the facts as

they presented themselves. When the defending attorney asks why the arresting officer did not use the battery of three standard roadside tests to determine sobriety, he answers that he didn't think that Matt could do it. At this point, the attorney emphasizes that the officer did not ask Matt if he could stand on one leg, even though there was "no body instability, no slurring, no flushed face, and no stumbling" (*little people BIG WORLD*, 2008). The arrest is made based on the smell of alcohol on Matt's breath and failure of the horizontal gaze test in which Matt's eyes 'jerked around' when following the officer's finger. Matt admitted to drinking one beer four hours earlier.

Matt explained during his arrest that the pedal extensions in Amy's vehicle were different from his vehicle and that this was the cause of his swerving across the line. When questioned at the trial, the officer stated that he could not understand why driving Amy's van instead of Matt's own vehicle would have caused Matt to weave across the line. The judge eventually acquitted Matt after calling a mistrial, because the horizontal eye gaze test is only 77% accurate, thus not fulfilling the parameters of reasonable doubt.

As I (and the jury members and the audience) reflect on what I might have done if in the same position as the arresting officer, the SRV theme of consciousness raising is illustrated. Would I also have assumed that Matt would not be able to stand on one leg? Are my perceptions of the abilities of the disabled such that I would not have bothered to determine what he could actually do? By making the viewer think about these questions, the episodes successfully raise awareness of these common negative assumptions.

Role Expectancy

The series does mostly combat the negative perceptions of historical deviancy roles. The Roloffs have many valued roles and are shown as capable of performing the tasks required for these roles. In Amy's case the episodes focus on her role as dedicated mother and supporting wife. In Matt's case

his role as businessman and bread-winner for the family are emphasized. In Zach's case his primary valued role is that of a soccer player.

Amy is never shown in a childlike role. She displays her sound judgment, sense of humour, and a caring demeanor. She is seen planning meals and lunches, driving the kids to school and practices, interceding whenever there is squabbling among the siblings, supporting the children when they have questions or worries, and instructing them with life's lessons. She talks to the children about what their thoughts and feelings are about their father's situation and answers their questions and reassures them.

Matt's breadwinner role is emphasized when he refers more than once to his family's dependence on his ability to earn money to support them. He states that "his life is in the [jury's] hands, his future, and his reputation" (*lpBW*, 2008). His concern over his reputation is related to his work and being able to maintain credibility with his clients in order to sell his products. His business acumen and skills are highlighted. The fact that he has been successful enough in the past to provide the 'good things in life' (Wolfensberger, Thomas, & Caruso, 1996) for his family demonstrates his competency in this valued role.

Zach's soccer-playing skills are highlighted throughout the series. In the show opening he is seen completing skill drills, and on the website for the series he has his own section on soccer facts. Since he is still a teenager and has not acquired many other social roles, this one is used almost exclusively. One danger is that this perception can be limiting; its overemphasis takes away recognition of his other qualities. For example, in the trial episodes he is seen as the leader of the family when Amy and Matt are away at court, even though his brother Jeremy is his same age.

Interpersonal Identification

What are we shown about the Roloffs with which we can identify? We see them completing the mundane activities all of us do in our daily lives.

They eat breakfast together, go to school or work, and do chores. We see Zach and his siblings worrying about what will happen to their father at the trial and Amy going to court to support him. Before the trial Matt is filmed speaking about his faith in God and the family prays that the truth will prevail. In their valued roles of mother, father, and son, we are able to connect to the expectancies of each of these roles because we ourselves may fill these roles in our own life. This is one of the stronger and more compelling aspects of the portrayals, as the family demonstrates that they are just like any other family. In my roles as mother, breadwinner, and athlete, I can relate to all the members of the family because I am familiar with the skills required and have experience with the commitment, hard work, and patience needed to fill the role effectively.

Compensation for Devalued Status

Are the valued roles emphasized in the series the most valued roles that each individual could fill? Not entirely, but overall, the choices have been positive ones that do work successfully at reinforcing positive characteristics.

In Amy's case, some stereotypical activities associated with being a wife and mother are repeated. For example, we see her making breakfast every morning, taking the kids to school every morning, and watch as she ices a chocolate cake for a celebration after the trial. She talks about having to put Matt to bed (as he needs physical assistance). However, it is when she is acting in her role as confidant and supportive guide to the children that we see the success in emphasizing her nurturing role.

In Matt's case, the fact that he is a successful businessman who owns a 34-acre farm and supports his family does much to compensate for the negative perceptions that people with disabilities need charity or financial support. He is not often portrayed in the father role, perhaps because he tends to be authoritarian in his approach to parenting, so the valued role of self-employed busi-

nessman is the most prominent in the show. He can also be argumentative and confrontational (a characteristic mentioned during the trial), so the producers apparently try to not show him when he is exhibiting these negative traits.

Along with Zach's role as an athlete, it would be valuable for him to be seen considering his career plans and making decisions about how he will become self-sufficient. This is a question that Matt himself often raises. It would also be more helpful for Zach's image to see him more involved in advocacy roles, as a student, as a responsible son and brother, as a friend and boyfriend, and so on.

Social Imagery

Some of the unconscious messages in the television episodes reinforce the devaluation consistent with deviancy roles. I will examine the physical setting, groupings with others, personal imagery, language, and activities and time use that may send devaluing messages to the viewer.

Physical setting. The Roloff home is a newly built large house situated on a hill on a 34-acre farm near Portland, Oregon. Matt talks about wanting to give his children a playground. The landscape reinforces this image and the children are often seen playing and riding around the farm. Unfortunately, the farm is designed as a wonderland—with a castle, tree house, western town, mineshaft, and playground equipment. This could lead to an association with the historic deviancy role of people with dwarfism being childlike and magical creatures.

Another (unconscious) message is that the farm is isolated in a sense from a larger community, just in the nature of being a farm. When Matt says that they are “making their own life” (*lpBW*, 2008) in the opening credits, it could be perceived that he is purposefully separating his family from the real world, perhaps to protect them from wounding experiences.

Groupings with others. Since Matt has lost his license and cannot drive, he has an assistant who drives and who accompanies him to the court-

room. We watch as the assistant Becky walks behind Matt on the steps at home, warning him, “Don't slip. Be careful, man” (*lpBW*, 2008). She helps him into the car and drops him off in front of the courthouse. When waiting in line outside the courthouse she opens up her coat and places it over Matt's head to protect him from the rain. All of these images reinforce his perceived dependence on her. The most telling image is when the camera stays focused on Matt and Becky as they are walking away side by side at the end of the day. The fact that Becky is a tall and large woman further emphasizes Matt's small stature. This unconsciously reinforces child associations and the perceived need for protection.

In the opening credits of the show Zach is shown with Jeremy, his twin. Zach zooms through Jeremy's legs while sitting on a skateboard and then climbs on him. As they walk away, Jeremy holds his arm straight above Zach's head. All of this emphasizes the difference in their size; despite being twins and the same age, these images reinforce the perception that Zach is younger than Jeremy. The children are also lined up at the end of the opening credits by size rather than age, which means that as Molly and Jake have grown, Zach's position has been moved down the line. This is another likely unconscious act of devaluation.

Personal imagery. Much is done to promote the status of Matt and Amy via their personal appearance. Amy usually wears pants and shirts, but is feminized with earrings and a stylish haircut. Matt is seen wearing a suit or in a dress shirt and pants; his hair is always impeccable. Zach is neat and tidy, but could do with some help with typical teenage issues like wearing the same clothes two or three days in a row. He is also often shown with the ubiquitous soccer ball in his hand. The fact that the Roloffs are middle class and own their own farm, home, vehicles, and furniture reinforces their economic status as well as their role as contributing paying members of society.

When Matt appears in the courtroom, his perceived dependency and difficulty in functioning

are highlighted. With camera angles that focus on his feet dangling above the floor when sitting in the defendant's chair, his smallness is overemphasized. By his use of crutches to walk, rather than the motorized chair he often uses, the effect of his physical disability is made more obvious. When he holds up his right hand to take the oath he keeps the crutch on his arm. This is unfortunate as it makes the jury members focus on his physical disabilities.

Another aspect of personal imagery is personal autonomy. Much of the show focuses on the decisions that Matt and Amy make in their lives and for their families. They are usually seen as in control when they solve problems. The trial takes away from that sense of control, but the family is seen as dealing with the situation in a calm and reflective manner and with a sense of their ability to deal with whatever the outcome might be.

Language. The term 'little people' is problematic. Although accepted by those with dwarfism because of the negative connotations attached to the term dwarf or midget, the term can lead to reinforcement of the child-like deviancy role. Hearing the term used could definitely lead to perceptions of not being able to do normative activities because of small size and lack of strength. The dichotomy emphasized in the title of the series (with little people in lower case and BIG WORLD in upper case letters) further reinforces this association.

When Amy talks about the "obstacles and challenges" she, Matt, and Zach face (*lpBW*, 2008), the accompanying images show them doing typically normal activities like operating a caterpillar machine, closing the rear hatch of the van, and riding a bike. The intent is to see these as situations of independence and competence, but the difficulties are also being highlighted. This can be confusing. Am I to feel sorry for them because of these troubles? Or am I to applaud them for confronting and managing them? Or am I to take on an advocacy role myself and press for the need for accommodations, like pedal extensions on vehicles that could enable them to drive?

Activities and time use. The focus on Amy's use of time in the mother role is effective at reinforcing her adult role and the role of nurturer and protector. Matt is often seen traveling for business purposes, whether by car or plane. He is also often seen on the phone or with clients. These activities are used to reinforce his role as a contributing member of society. For Zach, the emphasis on sports activities and other physical deeds such as driving the truck to pick up pumpkins is effective in highlighting his role as active teenager. Work, chores, school, and family responsibilities tend to take up most of his day. These activities reinforce identification with the Roloffs as many of the viewers compare it to their own lives.

An Evaluation of the Show's Success in Promoting Positive Perceptions

THE SERIES DOES A GREAT DEAL towards promoting positive perceptions about people with dwarfism, as represented by the Roloff family. They are self-sufficient enough to own their own home and support themselves, to work and to manage their own affairs. Matt's previous success as a software salesman and as author of the book *Against Tall Odds* (tlc.com, 2008) enabled him to have the financial security to establish his family in their dream home. Is their experience a typical one for people with this condition? This factor must be considered when thinking about whether the show will help change the perceptions of what people with dwarfism are capable of doing.

The show is adept in compensating for the historical deviancy associations related to our unconscious responses, often due to negative perceptions portrayed in other film and television. The valorization is effective by showing the family members in daily activities and in specific roles with which the viewer can identify. Independence, autonomy, and taking control of their lives are emphasized. Whether it is through starting a business, completing tasks like driving and household chores themselves and without the help of others, or making decisions about their children's future,

Matt and Amy demonstrate how competent they are. This illustrates the power of competency enhancement as a means to change people's perceptions and therefore increase the opportunity for devalued individuals to fill valued roles.

Despite a few problems with filming techniques and images that unconsciously negate some of the positives, overall the series is highly successful at making the viewer realize that the Roloffs are indeed, as Amy states, living "an ordinary life." We are able to understand that they can "pretty much do what everyone else does, but just in a different way" (*little people BIG WORLD*, 2008).

I do not perceive the series just as entertainment, but as a valid attempt to raise consciousness about our preconceived expectancies and stereotypes. It is a positive evolution to the historic portrayal of people with dwarfism on film. We are not shown scenes that would be considered making fun of any of their situations. The family has control over what is shown and what is not filmed and they are never exposed in ways that would demean or ridicule their behaviors.

Conclusion

THE PRODUCERS OF FILM AND TELEVISION portrayals of individuals in historically devalued roles, like those with dwarfism, should consciously attend to the specific ways they can change perceptions by using image enhancement and an emphasis on competency in valued roles. Since these portrayals are visual, it is necessary to ensure that the images used to portray the individuals support and reinforce the role valorization being attempted.

Series such as *little people BIG WORLD* are doing much towards advocating the right for persons with disabilities to gain the 'good things in life' that we all want. The human right to be treated well and with respect, no matter what the disability, is reinforced. If done in an effective and purposeful way, as this series clearly demonstrates, there is no question that film has the power to help change society.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Please see Wolfensberger's column for a related item (pp. 67-68) on dwarfism.*

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