

SRV

News & Reviews

ISSN 1932 - 6963

August 2022 • No. 1

www.srvip.org

The major goal of SRV is to create or support socially valued roles for people in their society, because if a person holds valued social roles, that person is highly likely to receive from society those good things in life that are available to that society

SRV News & Reviews

ISSN 1932 - 6963

August 2022 • No. 1

www.srvip.org

ADVISORY BOARD

Erica Baker-Tinsley

Matthew Brennan

Bill Forman

Gareth Lloyd

Jo Massarelli

Sergiu Toma, PhD

Marc Tumeinski, PhD

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

WE BELIEVE THAT SOCIAL ROLE VALORIZATION (SRV), when well applied, has potential to help societally devalued people to gain greater access to the good things of life & to be spared at least some negative effects of social devaluation.

Toward this end, the purposes of this periodical include: 1) analyzing phenomena that have SRV relevance; & 2) fostering, extending & deepening study of, dialogue about, & understanding of, SRV theory, training, research & implementation.

We intend the information provided in this publication to be of use to: family, friends, advocates, direct care workers, managers, trainers, educators, students, researchers & others in relationship with or serving formally or informally upon devalued people in order to provide more valued life conditions as well as more relevant & coherent service.

SRV News & Reviews is published under the auspices of the SRV Implementation Project (SRVIP). The mission of the SRVIP is to: confront social devaluation in all its forms, including the deathmaking of vulnerable people; support positive action consistent with SRV; & promote the work of the formulator of SRV, Prof. Wolf Wolfensberger.[†]

BACK ISSUES OF THE SRV JOURNAL

TO ACCESS FREE BACK ISSUES OF THE SRV JOURNAL, please access the SRVIP website at

[HTTP://SRVIP.ORG/JOURNAL_PAST_ISSUES.PHP](http://srvip.org/journal_past_issues.php)

SEND CORRESPONDENCE TO

Marc Tumeinski, Editor

The SRV Journal

PO Box 20392

Worcester, MA 01602 US

Email: journal@srvip.org

Website: www.srvip.org

TYPEFACE

Main text is set in Adobe Garamond Pro & headlines in Myriad Pro, both designed by Robert Slimbach.

A Brief Description of Social Role Valorization

From the Editor

IN EVERY NUMBER we print a few brief descriptions of Social Role Valorization (SRV). This by no means replaces more thorough explanations of SRV, but does set a helpful framework for the content of this publication.

The following is from: Wolfensberger, W. (2013). *A brief introduction to Social Role Valorization: A high-order concept for addressing the plight of societally devalued people, and for structuring human services* (4th ed.). Plantagenet, ON: Valor Press, p. 81.

... in order for people to be treated well by others, it is very important that they be seen as occupying valued roles, because otherwise, things are apt to go ill with them. Further, the greater the number of valued roles a person, group or class occupies, or the more valued the roles that such a party occupies, the more likely it is that the party will be accorded those good things of life that others are in a position to accord, or to withhold.

The following is from: SRV Council [North American Social Role Valorization Development, Training & Safeguarding Council] (2004). A proposed definition of Social Role Valorization, with various background materials and elaborations. *SRV-VRS: The International Social Role Valorization*

Journal/La Revue Internationale de la Valorisation des Rôles Sociaux, 5(1&2), p. 85.

SRV is a systematic way of dealing with the facts of social perception and evaluation, so as to enhance the roles of people who are apt to be devalued, by upgrading their competencies and social image in the eyes of others.

The following is from: Wolfensberger, W. (2000). A brief overview of Social Role Valorization. *Mental Retardation*, 38(2), p. 105.

The key premise of SRV is that people's welfare depends extensively on the social roles they occupy: People who fill roles that are positively valued by others will generally be afforded by the latter the good things of life, but people who fill roles that are devalued by others will typically get badly treated by them. This implies that in the case of people whose life situations are very bad, and whose bad situations are bound up with occupancy of devalued roles, then if the social roles they are seen as occupying can somehow be upgraded in the eyes of perceivers, their life conditions will usually improve, and often dramatically so.

If you know someone who would be interested in reading
SRVJ News & Reviews, send us their name & email
& we'll send them a complimentary issue.

A Brief Introduction to Social Role Valorization:

A high-order concept for addressing the plight of societally devalued people, & for structuring human services (*4th expanded edition*)

by Wolf Wolfensberger, PhD

“A long-held rationale of those of us who teach SRV Theory is that the material helps students to see the world from the perspectives of those who receive services & supports, rather than the service provider. Time & again, we hear students describe this as the single most important aspect of taking an SRV Theory course. They talk about how they now have new, or different, eyes with which to see & understand their world. Many describe the realization that *they* first had to change in order for them to address the issues & problems of the people they were assigned to teach or help. When they changed their perceptions of another person, they then changed their expectations of this person, along with their ideas of what the person actually needs & how to effectively address these needs” (from the foreword by Zana Marie Lutfiyya, PhD & Thomas Neville, PhD).



A Brief Introduction to Social Role Valorization

A high-order concept for addressing the plight of societally devalued people, and for structuring human services
4TH EXPANDED EDITION

Wolf Wolfensberger

Author: Wolf Wolfensberger, PhD, 1934-2011
Publisher: Valor Press (Plantagenet, ON–Canada)

Language: English

ISBN: 978-0-9868040-7-6

Copyright ©: 2013, Valor Press
presse.valorsolutions.ca

PRESSES
VALOR
PRESS

Resources to Learn about Social Role Valorization

- **A brief introduction to Social Role Valorization**, 4th expanded ed. Wolf Wolfensberger. (2013). (Available from the Valor Institute at 613.673.3583)
- **Advanced issues in Social Role Valorization theory**. Wolf Wolfensberger. (2012). (Available from the Valor Institute at 613.673.3583)
- **PASSING: A tool for analyzing service quality according to Social Role Valorization criteria. Ratings manual**, 3rd (rev.) ed. Wolf Wolfensberger & Susan Thomas. (2007). (Available from the Valor Institute at 613.673.3583)
- **A quarter-century of normalization & Social Role Valorization: Evolution and impact**. Ed. by R. Flynn & R. Lemay. (1999). Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press. (Available on socialrolevalorization.com)
- **A brief overview of Social Role Valorization**. Wolf Wolfensberger. (2000). *Mental Retardation*, 38(2), 105-123.
- **An overview of Social Role Valorization theory**. Joe Osburn. (2006). *The SRV Journal*, 1(1), 4-13. (Available at http://srvip.org/about_articles.php)
- **Some of the universal 'good things of life' which the implementation of Social Role Valorization can be expected to make more accessible to devalued people**. Wolf Wolfensberger, Susan Thomas & Guy Caruso. (1996). *SRV/VRS: The International Social Role Valorization Journal/La Revue Internationale de la Valorisation des Rôles Sociaux*, 2(2), 12-14. (Available at http://srvip.org/about_articles.php)
- **Social Role Valorization & the English experience**. David Race. (1999). London: Whiting & Birch.
- **The SRV Implementation Project website, including a training calendar** www.srvip.org
- **SRVIP Google calendar** http://www.srvip.org/workshops_schedule.php#
- **Abstracts of major articles published in The SRV Journal** <https://srvjournalabstracts.wordpress.com/>
- **International Social Role Valorization Association** <http://www.socialrolevalorization.com/>
- **Southern Ontario Training Group (Canada)** <http://www.srv-sotg.ca/>
- **A 'History of Human Services' course taught by W. Wolfensberger & S. Thomas (DVD set)** purchase online at <http://wolfwolfensberger.com/>

FROM THE EDITOR

A NEW SERIES

WE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE the publication of *SRV News & Reviews*. The core focus of this periodical is to publish material that analyzes phenomena with SRV relevance. This may take the form of brief items, book & movie reviews, book notices, & occasional longer articles & columns.

OUR ADVISORY BOARD

I EXTEND MY GRATITUDE to the members of our advisory board (listed on page 2).

INFORMATION FOR SUBMISSIONS

WE WELCOME WELL-REASONED, CLEARLY-WRITTEN submissions. Topics may include analyses of contemporary human service developments & items in the media, as well as book or movie reviews, or briefer notices of books & movies, from an SRV perspective. We will occasionally publish longer articles on SRV theory & PASSING, training & implementation.

Language used should be clear & descriptive.

We encourage the use of ordinary grammar and vocabulary that a typical reader would understand. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* is one easily available general style guide. Academic authors should follow the standards of their field. We will not accept items simultaneously submitted elsewhere for publication or previously electronically posted or distributed.

Submissions are reviewed by the Editor or external referees.

WELCOME TO THIS NEW SERIES, & we hope that you find the material relevant, instructive & thought-provoking.

Regards,
Marc Tumeinski, Editor

Save the Dates February 22-24, 2023 for the First International Social Role Valorization Distance Conference

The conference theme is “Social Role Valorization in the World” & some of our topics for learning & exploration may include: *teaching & implementing SRV & PASSING; 10 SRV Themes as they connect to the 42 PASSING Ratings; Model Coherency evaluation & design; the universality of devaluation across cultures, domains & service forms; cultural perspectives on societally valued roles & access to the ‘good things of life;’ Citizen Advocacy.*

Held fully online, the conference will offer plenary sessions, live & recorded presentations, & opportunities to connect & network with each other.

A call for proposals & much more detailed information is available now. Check www.socialrolevalorization.com & the SRV Facebook pages for updates!

Do Societally Devalued People Enjoy Being Restrained or Even Abused?

Wolf Wolfensberger[†]

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Our practice has been to publish any previously unpublished material authored by Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger of which we were in possession, even if the text is not directly connected to Social Role Valorization. This article falls into that category, although readers will find it easy to make connections from this article to SRV.*

THE ARTICLE BY Favell, McGimsey, Jones and Cannon (1981) on the possibility that physical restraint may act as a positive reinforcer addresses a very important issue in the lives of many severely impaired individuals. However, I was taken aback by some of the assumptions contained in, or suggested by, the wording employed in the article, and very much alarmed by the potential misuses of the conclusions.

The authors noted that if they are physically restrained, some retarded individuals who emit maladaptive behavior that is often considered to be either self-destructive or symptomatic of emotional disturbance will reduce such behavior not only during the period of restraint, but also thereafter, or even while anticipating restraint. Furthermore, by applying restraint the way one would ordinarily apply reinforcement, the authors noted that maladaptive behavior can be decelerated while adaptive behavior can be accelerated. Based on such observations, the authors used a phrasing on numerous occasions throughout the article to the effect that retarded individuals 'enjoyed' restraint.

Apparently, 'enjoyment' was inferred if individuals: appeared to be calmer and more relaxed while restrained than while not, and be aroused and disturbed when not under restraint; seemed to seek restraints; mimicked behavior ordinarily emitted under restraint; and made it easy for people to apply restraints to them.

What disturbs me about the language used in this article, and its general tenor of interpretation, is that it might provide a superb justification for people to apply all sorts of restraints to devalued people. Not only might it be argued that restraints are good for people, but that they want to be restrained, and enjoy it. These are the very types of arguments historically advanced whenever a powerful group applies all sorts of unworthy measures to devalued groups—usually weaker groups or minorities. This practice resembles a tendency among people to 'blame the victim,' as it is called today. In our own time, we are being told that elderly people seek self-segregation, enjoy being segregated from the rest of society and being with each other, etc. We have even witnessed the spectacle in recent years of prisoners accused or convicted of crimes asking to be executed—obviously facilitating and 'enjoying' the execution. If executions were survivable, we would probably hear all sorts of scientiflicated arguments that this form of 'treatment' should be applied repeatedly for the benefit of its recipients or 'subjects.'

The hyper-objectified language of our research literature, and the behavioristic use of language so as to avoid references to any inner private mentation, are stylized conventions that have gone too far, and I would not even go as far as endorsing the depersonalized style of the *Publication Manual* of the American Psychological Association that has been endorsed by many socio-behavioral periodicals. However, an objectified style is not without merit if we know when and how much to use it. In the case of the article by Favell, McGimsey, Jones and Cannon (1981), it would have been appropriate to keep the language on a more descriptive level.

Much as elderly people may ‘enjoy’ being segregated if it means that they will not be starved, frozen or beaten to death in the mainstream of a youth-centered hedonistic culture, so there may be several other interpretations as to why retarded people may emit calmer behavior in order to minimize likelihood of getting hurt again by

people who brandish restraints—and the fact that one may seek to hurt oneself does not mean that one enjoys being hurt by others. My instincts tell me that additional plausible explanations exist; but even if they did not, given the sociology of deviancy-making and deviancy-keeping, it would be preferable to use terms such as restraints calming people down rather than people ‘enjoying’ restraints.

Favell, J.E., McGimsey, J.F., Jones, M.L. & Cannon, P.R. (1981). Physical restraint as positive reinforcement. *American Journal of Mental Deficiency*, 85, 425-432.

WOLF WOLFENSBERGER, PHD, developed both *Social Role Valorization & Citizen Advocacy*, & authored over 40 books & 250 chapters & articles. He was Emeritus Professor at Syracuse University & directed the Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership & Change Agency, Syracuse, NY (US).

THE CITATION FOR THIS ARTICLE IS

Wolfensberger, W. (2022). Do societally devalued people enjoy being restrained or even abused? *SRV News & Reviews*, No. 1, 7-8.

REVIEW

A WHOLESOME HORROR: POOR HOUSES OF NOVA SCOTIA. By B. THOMPSON. Halifax, NS: SSP Publications, 2017.

Reviewed by Bill Forman

BRENDA THOMPSON HAS DONE A great service to the history of poverty in the province of Nova Scotia. Framed by a description of the English poor laws and how they were transacted in Nova Scotia, and the infamous and horrendous killing of one poor woman, Charlotte Hill, Thompson goes on to provide concise and compelling capsule histories of over 30 poor houses, poor farms and asylums, and the communities in which they grew up.

The effect is to dramatize the fact that bad treatment of the poor was endemic in the province (and no doubt in every province). She demonstrates that there were attempts to disguise or euphemize the wretched conditions, which included forced labor, family separation, substandard housing and nutrition, and even de facto slavery. Her extensive catalogue forces the reader to go beyond the consideration of isolated scandals to appreciate the fact that oppression and devaluation of the poor was woven into the fabric of Nova Scotia society.

After the collection of brief chapters describing each of the institutions she researched, Thompson provides additional thoughts on the particular experiences of poverty of African Nova Scotians, Mi'kmaq, elderly and disabled persons.

The author ends with a chapter exploring the ways in which poverty is still very much a part of the contemporary social fabric of Nova Scotia. Though the toxic rhetoric, Dickensian (and worse) conditions and labelling of the poor house era may be of the past, they have been replaced by a focus on 'boot strappism' which characterizes

the nature of modern approaches to poverty. The powers that be blame poverty on the indolence and alcoholism of the poor. Thompson contrasts this with the little acknowledged reality that vast amounts of money are directed to a human service industry designed to 'serve' the poor, which does very little to actually reduce poverty. She recounts the many disadvantages, barriers and disincentives that poor people face in modern society and which keep them poor.

Notes and quotes

Several of these poor houses were to be repurposed as facilities for different devalued groups. The Cumberland County Asylum in Pugwash, for instance, was renamed Sunset Adult Residential Centre in 1976 and now serves adults with developmental disabilities. From their website, the buildings appear to be new, but the history obviously lingers.

"Some poor house administrators made the inmates wear a patch on their clothing indicating which parish or village they were from." Note the connection to wounding, specifically deviancy imaging and symbolic branding.

A story of wounding: "In 1920, Lita Saulnier was just a young woman when she entered the poor house in Meteghan. She was ill. No one was quite certain what she was ill with, but Lita was admitted to the poor house nonetheless. She was thought to have contracted diphtheria, so the poor house administration put her alone in what was referred to as a 'strong room' in the basement. Strong rooms were used to keep 'inmates' of the poor house in a room they could not break out from. The inmates put in there could be violent, criminal or contagious with disease. Lita received her meals through an opening in the door to her

room, passed out her soiled laundry, received fresh laundry and associated with none of the other poor house inmates for 40 years! (emphasis author's) It was only after the poor house keeper retired and a new person was put in place in 1960 that Lita Saulnier was rediscovered. The new poor house keeper was appalled by Lita Saulnier's plight. Lita was brought out of the strong room cell, however by this time she had forgotten how to speak. She spent the remainder of her years at a home for the aged in Yarmouth, regained some of her speaking abilities, and passed away in the early 1980's."

Relevant to deindividuation: "Communal pauper funerals were a common occurrence in the work house where 'one service catered for all pauper burials taking place that day'."

"A common job for men in the early Victorian poor house was bone crushing. The task involved

using heavy metal ram rods to crush the bones of deceased inmates in order to create dust for fertilizer. In Andover, England, bone crushing created a minor scandal in 1845, when the practice became public knowledge. However, the outcry against the work was not a matter of offence taken by inmates crushing the bones of the poor house for fertilizer. *Rather the outcry arose when the public became aware that inmates were fighting over the scrap meat still found on the bones.*" (emphasis author's)

BILL FORMAN is an SRV trainer with over 30 years of experience in human services, advocacy, community development & adult education. He is a founding member of the Alberta Safeguards Foundation, an SRV training group.

THE CITATION FOR THIS REVIEW IS

Forman, B. (2022). Review of the book *A wholesome horror: Poor houses of Nova Scotia* by B. Thompson. *SRV News & Reviews*, No. 1, 9-10.

Social Role Valorization News & Reviews

Susan Thomas

THE SRV JOURNAL is no longer being published on a regular basis. It had a good run, from June 2006 through January 2018, and was preceded by *The International Social Role Valorization Journal/La revue internationale de la Valorisation des Rôles Sociaux*, from spring 1994 through 2004. Both these publications in all their back issues are available online.

Until his death in February 2011, Professor Wolf Wolfensberger, who invented Social Role Valorization (SRV), wrote a regular column in those journals, with the title “Social Role Valorization News and Reviews.” After his death, I continued the column with the same name. And since I am not dead yet, I have continued to collect relevant material and write about it; and the editor of *The SRV Journal*, Marc Tumeinski, invited me to continue the column in this new format but with the same name so as to provide continuity with the tradition established by the previous print publications. He is also publishing reviews specifically, of books, chapters, films, etc., and these will be written not just by myself but by other authors as well. So, while this column used to include such reviews, it will not do so any longer, as they appear separately.

With that introduction, now, to both former readers of *The SRV Journal* and new readers of this column, welcome.

As when this column appeared in *The SRV Journal*, there are multiple intents for this column:

(a) To present brief sketches of media items that illustrate an SRV issue.

(b) To present vignettes from public life that illustrate or teach something about SRV.

(c) Especially, to point to and analyze items that relate specifically to SRV implementation.

(d) To document certain SRV-related events or publications for the historical record.

(e) Hopefully, by all the above, to illustrate and teach the art and craft of spotting, analyzing, and interpreting phenomena that have SRV relevance.

Aside from being instructive to readers, people who teach SRV will hopefully find many of the items in this column useful in their teaching, and those who try to implement SRV may also find something helpful, perhaps to imitate or avoid.

*Our first item, to inaugurate this column, relates to the relativity or specificity of SRV, that is, what is role-valorizing or role-degrading may vary across time and cultures. For instance, one thing that came along with the COVID pandemic was the widespread wearing of masks that covered many facial features. On the one hand, this has made it easier for robbers to blend in easily with the crowds when they flee the scene of their crime, whereas before COVID they threw off their face coverings as soon as possible to avoid suspicion, though this discarding might be captured on surveillance cameras. In fact, in some locales, robberies increased as much as 50

percent following the imposition of mask-wearing (NOR, July-August 2020). At the same time and on the other hand, people with facial features that are socially devalued and would lead others to reject and distance them can cover them up without attracting undue attraction, and escape—at least while they have a mask on—that negative first reaction from others.

Some Items on Language

SRV deals with terms that are used to refer to and about people and their conditions, insofar as language is one of the conveyors of imagery, and of role expectancies and cues. Indirectly, language can also affect competency, via the aforesaid expectancies and mindsets it creates, which are then conveyed to people and affect their learning and performance.

Unfortunately, in human services, language has been permitted to be driven largely by sentiment and emotion (often, how a particular party claims to be hurt or “offended” by some term) rather than by reasoned analysis of language in general, and of specific words and phrases—and we need to be clear that such considerations go beyond SRV because they concern more than image and competency enhancement or degradation. Dr. Wolfensberger addressed this problem, as well as many others, with language in his 2002 article “Needed or at least wanted: Sanity in the language wars,” which appeared on pp. 75-80 of volume 40 of the journal *Mental Retardation*. (These days, some people would not even permit the name of the journal to be mentioned or appear in print.) The article is now old enough to be considered a “classic,” and deserves widespread dissemination.

Without reiterating the entire article, we here-with present a few items on language.

*In the Japanese language, the word transliterated as *wakeari* means “there is a reason.” When the word is attached to products, it indicates that the product is imperfect and rather than being thrown away, it is being sold at a lower price;

for instance, *wakeari* crackers might have cracks in them, and that is “the reason” that they are cheaper than whole crackers. But the word is also a catchphrase for people who have some imperfection (ODB, 9/10/11/2017, 62 [6, 7, 8]).

*A fitness center in Massachusetts is called “The Asylum Fitness Center,” and its tag line is “Commit yourself.” It is not located, as one might fear, in a former institution, but in its advertisement, the “l” in Asylum appears as a stylized bloody dagger—a negative image within a negative image.

*In the 1890s, poor boys who ran the streets in the immigrant neighborhoods of New York City called themselves “muckers,” probably from the muck that horses deposited in great quantities on city streets then. By embracing this term, they asserted a kind of underclass pride and defiance—similar to when homosexual people claim the term “queer” and use it about themselves. A 2016 book from Syracuse University Press—*The Muckers: A Narrative of the Crapshooter’s Club*, by William Osborne Dapping, one of those boys—tells the story of such boys and their life in the slums, from the perspective of the boys’ themselves. The manuscript is a century old, but was only recently re-discovered and published.

*And further to how a person or group refers to itself, there was an outcry when the new Duden dictionary—a standard dictionary of the German tongue—added this in its online version to its definition of Jew (Jude in German): “Occasionally, the term Jew is perceived as discriminatory because of the memory of the Nazi use of language. In these cases, formulations such as Jewish people, Jewish fellow citizens, or people of the Jewish faith are usually chosen.” Both the Central Council of Jews in Germany strongly protested, as did many individual Jews; the head of the Central Council said the word Jew is not a swear word, nor is it discriminatory, and added, “Please don’t say ‘Jewish fellow citizens’ or ‘people of the Jewish faith,’

just JEWS” (AP, in SPS, 17 February 2022). In other words, they were asking that so-called “people first” language not be used. Well, one cannot please everyone—but if that is the principle on which one decides what terms to use or abjure ...

*In the US state of Colorado, the Sex Offender Management Board—let us interrupt here to note that it is amazing that there is such a thing—voted to adopt “person-first” language by changing the term “sex offenders” to “adults who commit sexual offenses.” Supporters of this change argue that it will reduce stigma and recidivism, which is a most remarkable claim, and opponents argue variously that the change is demeaning to their victims, and removes accountability from the offenders—sorry, from the adults who commit sexual offenses (NOR, Jan.-Feb. 2022).

*We have noticed similarly that the terms “slaves” and “slavery” have fallen out of fashion, replaced by “enslaved persons” and “enslavement.” Presumably, this puts the emphasis on what is done to slaves by their enslavers, but whether this will contribute to any positive change in attitudes towards slavery, towards enslaved people, or towards the descendants thereof, is an open question and remains to be seen. We are skeptical, and with good reason. Language both affects and reflects mind-sets, but it is not an all-powerful tool that can fix the problem of social devaluation and derivative mistreatment.

*The pop singer Demi Lovato says it is offensive to call extraterrestrials “aliens.” Why? Because, she says, “that’s a derogatory term for *anything*” (emphasis hers), and that’s why she calls extraterrestrials “ETs” (*International Business Times*, 12 Oct. 2021, and NOR, Jan.-Feb. 2022). Let us pinch ourselves as a reminder that, until definitely proven otherwise, there are no extraterrestrial living beings, so the concern is over what to call things that do not even exist!

*An article in the *New York Times* (by J. Bennett, 5 February 2022) raised the question, if everything is now referred to as “trauma,” then is anything “trauma.” We agree, and would strongly recommend the terms “wounds” and “wounding,” as used in SRV teaching, because they cover a wide range of phenomena and experiences, and can be clarified by adjectives such as severe, deep, minor, life-defining, etc., whereas trauma connotes a serious injury and often with significant lasting sequelae.

*We were told that a particular service recipient was referred to as “a dangerous condition at work” for the people who served her, thus casting her into both the roles of object (a condition) and of menace (dangerous). Ordinarily, dangerous working conditions would be considered things such as working near a battle line, or with machinery that can cause serious harm, or working without basic safety equipment.

*We never tire of repeating it, though readers might well tire of reading or hearing it, that devaluation is a human universal that will continue as long as humans continue. The playwright Arthur Miller, who was himself a Jew, wrote in a 1964 one-act play *Incident at Vichy*, set during the round-up of Jews in France in World War II, “Jew is only the name we give to that stranger ...,” “Each man has his Jew; it is the other. And the Jews have their Jews.” The Jews have been one of the most widely persecuted groups over the world and through time.

Some Means for Enhancing Competency

One of the two major strategies for role-valuation is personal competency enhancement (the other is image enhancement), especially of those competencies that are tied to and/or can be converted into positively valued social roles. Here are some items on means for such competency enhancement.

*In a poor hamlet of just 300 people in the southern US state of North Carolina, heart disease was rampant, killing many young people. A Baptist pastor taught the 4- to 16-year olds at his church summer camp how to grow their own food on small plots of land, and the next year they delivered free boxes of vegetables to elderly people in their community. Interestingly, some church elders were not happy with this, as they felt it continued their people's previous devalued roles as share-cropping farmers and even field-working slaves. Despite this opposition, the pastor continued and enlarged the work, eventually developing a family life center with 21 gardened acres that sells its produce to local hospitals, schools and restaurants, while still continuing the free distribution to church members. Overall, the town's population lost weight, has lowered blood pressure, makes fewer visits to hospital emergency rooms, and takes fewer medications (RD, June 2018). Not only is health itself a competency, but good health also supports the development and practice of other competencies. And the youngsters acquired competencies related to food production, inventory and sales, math, etc.

*The Shirley Ryan AbilityLab has been established in Chicago to assist people with home modifications after an accident, injury, surgery, etc., renders the home no longer easily navigable and usable—what is called accessibility. People can get overwhelmed contemplating all the changes that may be needed, the cost involved, whether to rent or buy equipment and modified furnishings, what ought to be done first, where small accommodations will do instead of major renovations, and the like (Bowen, in *Chicago Tribune*, 6 December 2020).

*There are all sorts of equipment and assistive devices to enable people to do things they otherwise could not do or only do with much difficulty, or to assist someone to carry out a task, but not all such equipment is well-designed or actually help-

ful. And these gadgets can range from small to quite big, and from inexpensive to quite costly. For instance, there is a razor called the TREQ specially designed for shaving someone else rather than oneself; there is a folding wheelchair, the Revolve Air, that fits into the overhead compartment in an airplane; there is an accessory for power wheelchairs, LUCI, that monitors the chair's battery power and surrounding environment, to avoid it tipping over edges; and in Germany, a woman who has used a wheelchair for a quarter-century has constructed sturdy ramps made out of the plastic toy Legos—these can be quickly and easily and cheaply installed virtually anywhere.

*“Fixed: The Science/Fiction of Human Enhancement,” 2013, 1 hour documentary, directed by Regan Brashear. This film explores efforts—already very far advanced—to not only compensate for physical impairments so as to attain normative functioning, but to even give the body super-human capabilities, and overcome the normative declines that accompany aging. The film would be good for an SRV analysis, but it also addresses topics that SRV may raise or evoke but that go beyond SRV such as the morality of artificial baby-making and genetic engineering.

*Here's another thing we never tire of repeating (but that possibly readers tire of reading and hearing), and that research continues to support, namely, physical movement is one of the best things for the human body and mind, and at any age. Even a very little helps, though of course some movement and exercise is better for strengthening, for flexibility, for improved lung and heart functioning, and so on. And movement and exercise are very easy to tie to many and varied positively valued roles of sport and athletics.

*There is a middle and high school in Georgia with approximately 90 students that teaches only refugee children, with another to open in Ohio soon. The school was founded by a woman who

is the daughter of immigrants herself and a soccer coach, and soccer is the foundation of everything the school does. A school just for refugee children is in itself an issue worthy of SRV analysis, but in regards to competency enhancement, it is noteworthy that when they started middle school grades, many students only read at a kindergarten level. The school reports a 100 percent graduation rate and every one of them is accepted to college, and these are students who are almost all the first in their family to even make it past middle school. All the students participate in soccer—the sport is one of the most widely-played all around the world, and most come already interested and with some skill in the game. Soccer is used to teach not just physical prowess but also teamwork and overcoming adversity. Students read their report cards aloud, and if a grade is slipping for someone, the whole student body works on fixing it (WD, March 2018, and RD, November 2019).

Imitation and Modeling

One of the most powerful ways of enlarging competencies is via imitation and modeling, which is also one of the most natural ways of teaching and learning as the tendency to imitate is embedded in human nature. An SRV challenge is to figure out, who would be good models for devalued people to imitate, and how can that imitation be facilitated?

*People will go to great lengths to model themselves after someone they admire. For instance, people have adopted the costumes and mannerisms of music and movie stars they idolize, and even of fictitious characters such as characters in Star Trek and even Barbie dolls. A plastic surgeon in Texas was asked to make a woman look like Kamala Harris, current vice president of the US, but this was even before the Democrats Biden and Harris were elected to office. And the surgery is quite extensive, involving several elements of the face and parts of the torso. He had already operated on other women so that they resembled

relatives of the previous and Republican US president, Trump, and on three women who wanted to look like Meghan Markle, and numerous others who wanted to look like actresses (*Newsweek*, 1 October 2020).

*An African-American woman grew up in poverty, but managed to attend the prestigious American School of Ballet and danced with the also prestigious New York City ballet. At the time she was the sole black ballerina in the company and one of only few in the whole world. Now retired from dancing, she started the Swan Dream Project to show young African-American girls that they too can become ballet dancers (SPS, 11 February 2018). Of course, many practical things have to be done to convert dreams into reality, and overcome the many obstacles that may exist, but the children now have a model to imitate of a valued role that would otherwise not likely have been a real possibility for them.

The Mind, and Enhancing Its Competencies

It is gratifying that research continues to confirm the premises and postulates of SRV, as these next items illustrate.

*The human brain is incredibly plastic. This flexibility does diminish with age, but is never entirely lost, meaning that at any age, the brain can be “re-wired” (to use a machine analogy) so as to allow a different kind of use of an area of the brain that had previously been dedicated to something else. For instance, even people who lose their sight only temporarily can learn in a short period of time to be more sensitive to touch and sound, and brain scans show that their visual cortex is taken over for these other senses. This phenomenon also seems to be intriguingly related to the rapid-eye-movement, or REM, phase of sleep (Eagleman & Vaughn, in *Time*, 18-22 February 2021). All very encouraging for the proposition that at any stage of life, humans are capable of at least some growth and development.

*A 2017 book, *Before You Know It: The Unconscious Reasons We Do What We Do* (J. Bargh, Simon & Schuster publishers) supports the long-standing claim that we are deeply influenced in many ways by all sorts of things of which we are unaware, including how aspects of our physical environment unconsciously influence our judgment of other people (“even saintly folks turn into sinners when they miss their customary dinners”).

*According to the Canadian social analyst Marshall McLuhan, we cannot absorb all the data or information that comes at us—we make the same point in teaching about social devaluation—and that includes information about people, only few of whom can we know well. That is why we rely on stereotypes, he said: “When you give people too much information, they resort to pattern recognition” (E. Mitchell in *Smithsonian*, July-August 2017). As we also teach in SRV, it serves no purpose to blame people for doing what they are built to do, namely to cope with the vast amount of information in the world by relying on patterns and stereotypes. The adaptive strategy is to take this information and use it in a way that would benefit people who are usually subjected to negative stereotypes: making sure that first impressions and first contacts are positive, trying not to reinforce a negative stereotype as by appearance or activity or juxtaposition, etc.

*Just as we tend to divide people into either-or categories regarding other traits (tall/short, smart/stupid, outgoing/shy, right-brained/left-brained, etc.), so too do we do with creativity. Yet at least creativity can be increased, and in part by relying on the much-denigrated stereotypes (see previous item) about certain people and certain roles, and on role expectancies. For instance, poets tend to be thought of as more creative than, say, grocery store clerks. Imagining oneself as in a creative role such as poet actually increases creative output over imagining oneself as a grocery store clerk. However, this is very unfortunately referred to as

“psychological Halloweening,” as in adopting a persona or character as one would put on a Halloween costume (**The Cut**, 2 June 2017). Thus, if one wanted to enhance a particular person’s creativity and imagination—or for that matter, someone’s social graces, thoughtfulness of others, or any characteristic that might be contributive to their greater social valuation—some pretending could be very helpful. And then the next step would be to try to embed the behavior, via repetition, good modeling, etc.

*Relatedly, there is some research that some head traumas (and yes, we mean real trauma here) can result in the development of new abilities of even an amazing degree, referred to as “acquired savant syndrome” in reference to so-called savants: people who are significantly mentally impaired but have some remarkable skill of mathematics or musicality, for instance. In some instances, this has even led to new valued roles for people. For instance, one man who suffered a serious concussion became an amateur musician; another was able to see and sketch intricate geometric patterns, and he is now one of the few people who can draw fractals (RD, March 2018).

Of course, not everyone who suffers serious brain damage ends up very proficient in a new array of skills; that is dependent on the injury. But it is yet more testimony to the hidden capacities within humans that can be elicited.

*The placebo effect and research on it is endlessly fascinating, and is very closely related to the power of expectancies that plays such a big role in SRV. The placebo effect refers to positive response to a treatment, even if it is ineffective, because of faith in it. The nuggets here are taken from a lengthy report by R.A. Siegel in the May 2017 issue of *Smithsonian* magazine.

There is massive evidence that placebos outperform anti-depressant drugs, and without the harmful so-called “side effects” of the “real” drugs.

So does physical exercise (see preceding item under “Some Means for Enhancing Competency”).

New research shows that even when people know that what they are taking is an ineffective placebo, called an “open label” placebo, or a placebo that is prescribed as a placebo, even so they respond positively to the treatment via the psychological mechanism that can help people self-heal. Some researchers are promoting doctors prescribing open label placebos as a way of treating certain symptoms without all the costs and side effects of real drugs.

A key element in the placebo effect is the way our expectations shape our experience. Research has also shown that prescription pain medicine loses half its effectiveness when the person receiving it does not know that it is a painkiller—in other words, when their mind has not been prepared to expect the pain to be relieved. And when a placebo is labeled with the name of a real drug, it has the same effect as the real drug it is posing as.

Another key element in the placebo effect is an empathetic caregiver, that is, a good relationship with the server—the healing power of kindness and compassion. Studies have shown that adherence to the treatment regimen (e.g., take these two pills three times a day, see your therapist to talk for an hour once a week) increases placebo effects.

Like any real medicine, the placebo might take a couple of weeks to build up to a therapeutic “dose” or effect.

Much of our expectations are triggered by the symbols and rituals of health care, such as the pinprick of a needle injection, and the sight of people in white coats. Some studies on acupuncture have found that when it is performed with retractable needles (that do not actually pierce the skin), or lasers that similarly do not, or on the “wrong spots” on the skin for the organ concerned, it nonetheless still works. Clearly, what “works” is the expectation and not the actual procedure.

And the effects are not just imaginary, real neurochemicals such as real endorphins (natural painkillers) are triggered. If you tell people that

placebos work by rituals and symbols, they do not believe it; but if you tell them it works by releasing dopamine, then they believe it and feel better.

Unfortunately, in my judgment, many people also have a mental obstacle to taking advantage of what the placebo effect can do: they think something is being put over on them, and therefore resist accepting the evidence and considering how to use it to assist physically ill and mentally distressed people.

Wounds and Wounding

Social devaluation is expressed by hurtful things being done to the object of the devaluation: what SRV terms the infliction of wounds (these may be physical, mental, emotional, relational) that impair people’s well-being, image and competency, and often lead to life-long difficulties.

*There are so many things in the lives of devalued people to cry and sigh over. One of them is the endless casting of adults into child roles that diminish the expectations and opportunities offered to them and narrow their lives. This writer collects obituaries of people with some societally devalued condition (as readers of the previous print versions of this column know, they have often been mentioned in earlier columns), and one from October 2021 showed a picture of a 5-year old though the man, who had Down’s Syndrome, had lived to age 70. A number of family roles were mentioned, and he was said to have “loved dancing, but most of all, he loved to eat.”

*There is similarly no end to the wound of ignoring the presence of unwanted devalued people. A blind Irish woman referred to the “does she take sugar?” brigade, people who act as if she is not there to speak to directly, and who may even speak to her guide dog but not her (*Irish Times*, 10 October 2017).

*Anthony Esolen is a professor and writer who, among other things, critiques current sociology,

politics and law. In his 2017 book *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture* (Regnery Press), he notes that even for ordinary children, the 12 years they spend in mandatory schooling are “in large part an enormous waste of time because very little of the true, the good, and the beautiful is learned there.” In SRV language, the wound of life-wasting is inflicted upon them. Readers are invited to contemplate the enormity of this wound, considering how many children around the world are subject to it.

*In 2019, a state-run institution for mentally handicapped people in Iowa was found to have subjected residents to dangerous experiments, including giving people too much liquid, and an alleged sexual arousal experiment. Residents were also subjected to restraints, and left in unsafe conditions. An unexpectedly high number of deaths is what drew attention and investigation (D. Pitts, in *Omaha World Herald*, 24 December 2020). In SRV language, this is a form of the wound of brutalization and deathmaking.

*The book of Jewish religious law and theology, the Talmud, says that to kill one person is as much as killing everyone (and similarly, that to save one life is as much as saving all of humanity). Relatedly, it says that to publicly humiliate someone is tantamount to killing the person, and even goes so far as to say, “One should rather commit suicide than offend a person publicly” (*Plough*, Spring 2018). This relates to both the wound of symbolic stigmatizing, also called negative image juxtaposition or symbolic marking or “branding,” and of relegation to low social status.

*One of the wounds commonly inflicted on devalued people is breaking of natural and freely-given relationships, including with family and community, and another is being deprived of ordinary experiences. A study found that it was common for mentally handicapped people to not even be told of the death of family members and friends,

and to not be invited to funerals and memorial services for them (R. Forrester-Jones, 2013, The road rarely taken, *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 26(3), 243-256).

*One kind of impoverishment of experience for the poor, and especially poor children, is being deprived of knowledge of and experience in making and saving money, which of course limits their ability to get out of poverty and remain out of it. This type of knowledge is now called “financial literacy”; it is also related to the development of self-confidence and responsibility, and can enable entrance into many valued roles that are closed to people who cannot manage money.

Interpersonal Identification

When people perceive important similarities between themselves and another person, even see themselves in that other person, that is called interpersonal identification. And when people identify with each other, then they generally want good things for each other, want to be with each other and to be like each other, communicate good things about each other to yet others, and are much less likely to do—or want to do—hurtful things to each other, such as the wounds that so often express and convey devaluation.

*One way for non-handicapped people to better identify and empathize with handicapped ones is to experience what living with an impairing condition is like. Of course, this can only be done to a degree—for instance, an impairing condition might be assumed for a day or a week, but that is not the same as living with it life-long—and sometimes the means for doing so are a bit “hokey,” but the experience has been repeatedly shown to improve attitudes of the non-handicapped towards the people with the impairment they assumed. There is now a high-tech Age Suit that simulates the impairments in hearing, vision and mobility that may accompany aging, and was designed specifically for those in care-giving roles vis-à-vis

elderly people, to help them better understand those they serve. A *Wall Street Journal* correspondent wore the suit and said the experience was both unforgettable and distressing; he further recommended that virtual reality equipment be used to help give the same kind of experience (ODB, 9/10/11/2017, 62[6, 7, 8]).

*Haranguing people to change their attitudes has been shown to not contribute to attitude improvement, whereas fostering interpersonal identification does. But this does not stop those who like haranguing from continuing to do it. Many people who apparently like to harangue others can be found in academia, and people there can be punished for doing things that any number of groups “take offense” at; sometimes, but not always, these actions actually are offensive. One man recalled his experience in the military, where recruits were assigned “battle buddies” who were teammates that had to be relied upon to get through basic training; buddies were intentionally assigned to people of different races and from different areas of the country (W. Wilson, in SPS, 1 December 2019). Having to rely so deeply on someone of different identity and background, and going through such challenging experiences with them, tends to strengthen interpersonal identification. There might be similar opportunities in schooling, in at least certain work settings, and in athletics, that could be capitalized upon where a party is participating who might likely be devalued and rejected.

Social Imagery

In addition to competency enhancement, the other main avenue to role-valorization is image enhancement. Images are the mental pictures about a party held by others, and these may either contain and convey negative messages, such as sub-humanity, danger, sickness, or positive ones such as strength, beauty, and similarity to others. One of the most powerful ways in which mental images about people are created and sustained is via juxtaposition of a symbol to a person or group.

*Here is an example of a bad juxtaposition: a newspaper report on a race, called the Burn Run, to raise money for a camp and other services for burn victims appeared on the same page, and right next to, an article headlined “Sanitizer-covered man catches fire when Tased,” about a man who had doused himself with hand sanitizer (which contains alcohol) and had “burst into flames” when police used a taser to subdue him (SPS, 8 November 2021).

*A church in the German village of Herxheim am Berg has a bell with a swastika on it and an inscription dedicating it to Adolf Hitler. There is considerable local debate about whether to keep or remove it (NBC News, 28 February 2018). This is a sort of epitome of being—excuse us—“tone deaf” to the realities of imagery.

*“Sam & Mattie Make a Zombie Movie” is a 2021 film, available on Apple TV+, that follows two friends, young men who both have Down’s Syndrome, “on their tenacious 10-year quest to storyboard, script, produce, cast and star in 2016’s ‘Spring Break Zombie Massacre,’ a comedy slasher movie complete with severed heads and spurting arteries” (M. Pratt, AP in SPS, 18 April 2021). We recognize that the project may have allowed the two men to fulfill their dream roles of being filmmakers, and apparently the production of the movie involved a great deal of social integration with the actors and crew. But it also juxtaposed them to a genre with negative associations of blood and gore and mayhem and devils and horrific creatures, and all the publicity around them and the movie contained a great deal of this. And this cannot be dismissed as having no impact just because the two men like horror movies, especially since people with Down’s Syndrome have themselves been imaged as non-human and genetic horrors.

*A woman discovered that the rooms in which cancer patients received chemotherapy treat-

ments, a process that often takes several hours, were bare with chipped paint. Not only are such settings depressing (and therefore not contributive to health and recovery, which SRV would address under competency enhancement), but they also convey negative imagery to and about people with cancer. She contacted local interior designers, and a number volunteered to each re-do one of the treatment rooms with artwork and ornamentation and light and furnishings. A woman who was dealing with a third recurrence of cancer said she had not thought she could fight it again but that once she saw the rooms, “I’m gonna beat it this time,” and a physician noted that even his own tone of voice was different when he entered the redecorated rooms (RD, May 2018).

*Personal appearance is one of the most immediate conveyors and shapers of imagery. A little girl with alopecia (in which the person loses all their hair) was sometimes taunted as “Baldy,” and wore scarves and wigs. Then her school announced a “Crazy Hair Day” competition, and the girl’s mother decorated her head with stick-on jewels and flowers—she won the competition and now sports lots of different looks thanks to the wealth of stickers that can be found in craft stores (RD, September 2017). What would be even better (more role-valorizing) would be if her classmates also started putting such stickers all over their heads.

*An entire area of imagery surrounds the use of animals to assist, and provide comfort and companionship to, devalued people. Very problematic from the perspective of SRV are three aspects of this phenomenon.

One is the relentless interpretation of such animals as “therapy dogs” (or cats or birds or ...), which casts an imagery of sickness on the whole process and especially on the people served. Even the phrase “emotional support animals” is problematic, as it interprets the people who hang around with them as in need of something more

than the ordinary support and closeness that ordinary pets have always provided. Why is not every pet who ever existed called an emotional support animal?

Another is the fact that such animals are often brought in as substitutes for human relationships for people who are virtually abandoned, such as many old people in nursing homes.

A third is people claiming, and even getting physicians to certify, that their pet is a service or support animal merely so that they will be able to take it on board an airplane with them at no charge. The inconvenience, and sometimes nips and bites, that other passengers endure as a result contributes to resentment and negative attitudes even when the animal is a “real” service animal, such as a guide dog.

The following several items relate to this topic.

*More and more people in the US have been raising chickens in their backyards, even when they live in urban and not rural areas. This was happening prior to COVID, but got a big boost when many people were forced to stay at home. One woman who raises her own chickens and also teaches others the ins-and-outs of doing so in cities and suburbs also went through training of “30 hours for certification as a handler of therapy chickens. She also teaches others how to select and train the best candidates for the purpose of bringing joy to dementia patients, nursing home residents, people with special needs, and younger folks on the autism spectrum” (K. Riordan, in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 November 2020). Thirty hours! That’s as long as an introductory SRV workshop!

And yet we are also told that dogs can become “certified” emotional support animals with no training whatsoever, apparently only with a letter from a physician (K. Tulloch, in SPS, 21 January 2018), though it is not a veterinary physician but a human physician who has to pen the letter. Or perhaps it’s only chickens and other non-dog species who require the training?

*Delta Airlines had apparently had enough of this—or rather, its passengers had—and in early 2018 began to require more documentation that an animal that someone wanted to bring on board would actually behave. It said “Customers have attempted to fly with comfort turkeys,”—we wonder how they would get along with therapy chickens?—“gliding possums known as sugar gliders, snakes, spiders and more.” There was a 150 percent rise just since 2014 in people bringing supposed service and support animals on Delta flights, accompanied by an 84 percent increase in biting and other “disturbances” since 2016 (*Wall Street Journal*, 20-21 January 2018).

In early 2020, the US Department of Transportation imposed new regulations severely limiting the types of animals that could fly free of charge. The article reporting this (D. Koenig, in SPS, 23 January 2020) also told us that people have brought pigs and pheasants, in addition to the creatures we have already mentioned, and presented them as support animals.

Lest readers think us hard of heart, we can reassure you that we believe all of God’s creatures have some part to play in the world and are to be treated humanely, but we do not find it easy to actually love them all, and we believe that some of them belong outside—and of course, all these things are also beyond SRV! ☺

SUSAN THOMAS is the Training Coordinator for the Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership & Change Agency, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, USA. She is the co-author of PASSING.

THE CITATION FOR THIS COLUMN IS

Thomas, S. (2022). Social Role Valorization news & reviews. *SRV News & Reviews*, No. 1, 11-21.