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Kazeem A. Badrudeen, EA, CDP

Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies

Carla Hamarsnes

University of Calgary

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the themes and concepts of social role valorization, its application to creating a meaningful life for devalued individuals, and to examine its interpretation on value-based roles. To this end, this paper will offer a critical reflection, based on personal experiences, values and understanding of social role valorization and its concepts.

social role valorization: A Critical Reflection

In today's society, there are efforts being made to ensure that people with disabilities and other devalued population are afforded more opportunities to attain the good things in life. Both government and non-governmental organizations are working towards creating policies and programs that afforded these individuals opportunities for integrations and shared experiences. The social role valorization serves as a tool in assisting

Reflection on the devaluation process

As we were going through this aspect of the workshop, I could not help but indulge in thoughts of my own personal experience when it comes to devaluation. As an individual considered to have a visual impairment, legal blindness, I find it challenging to read documents that are not in 18 point font. While my visual impairment could be considered a disability, it is only so when I am not provided the appropriate equipment or font to be able to function in my various roles. I have come to a realization that because we are bombarded with negative stereotypes about people through movies, TV, newspapers, etc., it is seen as natural to dislike those things that are different from us; it is seen as acceptable to reject people because they cannot access what we consider valuable. It is acceptable for you to tell a person who has a visual impairment and often has to get up very early to get to the bus stop that he is 10 minutes late for his appointment. People are devalued because society chooses what they value and anything of exception is frowned upon. People are devalued as a result of power deferral.

A Reflection on the Wounding Process

For me, the process of wounding begins with the internalization of being “disabled”. You start to believe that you are not good enough; you start to wish that you were just like those able-bodied people; you start to believe that you have nothing of value to contribute. Wounding can be crippling.... it is a form of disability in itself. When you cannot get people to see what you have to offer, it consumes you and you start to assume the identity it represents. I think that when Darcy was talking about how important it is for wounding to be prevented, I agree with her. Building a solid foundation for trust and relationship is the key to preventing wounds. It takes time – it takes time for relationship and trust to be developed, but when done right it can have a profound impact on a person’s life. From my experience, I had an Educational Assistant when I was in middle school who took the time to build a relationship and this had a great impact on my life. I honestly do not know where I would be today without her contribution to my life.

The Importance of Social Valorization

From my perspective, I think that having valued social roles is not only important, it is vital to attaining what we consider to be the good things in life. It elevates people’s status and it gives them confidence and self-esteem to attain and maintain what we considered valuable. It is common in today’s society to see people take for granted the importance of having valued roles, but those who are considered “devalued” understand how hard it is to climb up to those roles. We all have many roles in society, some of which we were born into and some of which we attain throughout our lives. Value is given to each role, depending on many factors.

Need to Devalue Other People: As we did the activity that Darcy guided us through, I could not help but understand better how easy it is to slip into the mindset that allows you to devalue people. I was very shocked to see all the people that I had mentioned on my list. It goes

to show that no matter how good or kind-hearted we might be, we all have those that we would rather not associate with, people we consider less important. Keeping this in mind raises my consciousness and allow me to be more aware of my biases.

Opportunity for Social Change: For me, one of the important aspects of this course is how easy it is to contribute to a more just and equal society, how simple some of the things were and the impact they can have on a person's life. It also provides opportunities for organizations to focus on the programmatic issues rather than the non-programmatic things. Due to how accessible the program is, it makes it easier for professionals and organizations to have the information they need right at their fingertips. The most important part for me is how it costs nothing to put any of these theories into practice.

Partnering with devalued people: One other aspect of social role valorization for me is partnership: it has to be a collaborative process for it to be effective. An almost more important concept is the need for a partnership to be person-driven and person-centered. I think when we work together and the aim is to see the individuals that we work for attaining socially valued roles, we can empower people by giving them ownership and responsibility over these new roles. Often what I can envisage to be a problem with this kind of approach is that the person might only be given to those roles as a token, but if we can ensure that the person truly is contributing, the more likely the roles will be valuable.

Structures That Maintain Devaluation: As it might be true that human beings are naturally conditioned to devalue, I am of the opinion that if there were no structures or practices that maintain this phenomenon, devaluation would be less common. The structures I am referring to are our institutions and the tools of the elite classes, the oppressors, the rich and powerful; they use their power and prestige to maintain the status quo so that there will always be people in

that deviancy role. As an agent of change, I believe we need to work together to challenge the status quo.

Themes of SRV

Consciousness and unconsciousness

This was one of the most eye-opening aspects of the course for me. I had no idea how many conclusions we arrive at without thinking consciously about them. Due to the fact that it is so natural and in many cases we do not even realize it, drawing such conclusions gives way to many stereotypical behaviors and biases about people. One of the ideas that also occurs to me through this workshop/course is how much our biases shape our identity. During one of the activities, I realized to what extent those people I did not want to be associated with are less present in my life. I find this very deceptive in the sense that I do not selectively exclude these individuals from my life, but unconsciously I do. One of the things I am having difficulty with is how hard it is to change my biases. I think one of the issues I am experiencing is how easy it is to want to associate with people who think like me. The problem with this is that they do not challenge my thinking in a way that reveals my unconscious assumptions because in many cases they hold the same flawed assumptions. In this regard, I feel that being more conscious of my unconscious assumptions will definitely expose me to many opportunities to make changes that I would not have considered without taking this course.

The Conservatism Corollary

I think the key to fully understanding what the conservatism corollary entails is heightened vulnerability. While I have definitely been devalued in two different societies in my lifetime, I do not consider myself to live in a state of heightened vulnerability. I have been lucky enough in my life to meet amazing people who champion my right to inclusive education and the

right to valued social roles. Although I am definitely always going to be mindful of my heightened vulnerability in some society, I have chosen to embrace the freedom and the liberation that exists when one is in valued social roles. In many cases, I understand what people with deviancy roles goes through and how important it is to prevent further bricks from falling on them. This is one of the reasons why I chose this program. I want to be a part of helping people gain valued roles in society; I want to be a part of making a difference in my various capacities. Particularly, I want to help prevent further bricks from falling. I do not believe I can provide people with positive compensation; I believe I can help people gain positive compensation. I am a firm believer in the strength-based approach. Helping people find their voice, helping them realize they have power – volitional power over their life – this is my goal. One of the other key aspects of this is helping people choose valued options. Influencing them by modeling appropriate roles that exist within society is the way to go. One challenge that I have with this theme is that it suggests we influence people's decisions, which I do not particularly agree with. When we help people in a genuine and open-minded way, the result is more empowering and liberating in ways that influence people by providing them with roles to choose from. Making available all the roles and guiding them to select the most valued one is my approach.

Mindset and Expectation

This is another important aspect of the themes of social role valorization that I can relate to. Growing up in a country where there are very limited resources (if any) for individuals with visual impairment, I faced a lot of challenges with my education. Even though my parents were both educated, they struggled to understand why a typical classroom was not a fit for me. As a result of cultural expectation, they began to think that perhaps I should just go to trade school

and learn a mechanical job. In my country, being a mechanic or carpenter or panel beater is what is expected of those with a low intelligence quotient. Since I was not thought to be progressing, I was thought to be less intelligent than other students in the classroom. However, I was not provided with the proper equipment to allow me to demonstrate my potential. Mindset drove what my parents thought, what my teachers were communicating with them to convince them that I must be less intelligent. The point I am trying to make is that one's mindset usually drives one's expectations. If you are thought to be smarter, more opportunities will be afforded to you to be smart. So while I was sitting and listening to this part of the lecture, I could not help but tear up a bit. When less is expected of you, there is less opportunity to attain valued social roles. For me, I was determined to get a good education – regardless of what the expectations and mindsets of people might be; I was determined to show my capabilities.

Creating Positive Social Roles

What occurred to me during this course is the importance of *creating* positive social roles. It had never occurred to me that various roles can be created and discontinued. The more that I entertained this idea, the more interested and curious I became. I was particularly intrigued by the idea that our expectations about what roles people should hold in society are communicated in different ways. What struck my curiosity is how these variables could be used in enhancing or degrading people's images. As I began to think, it occurred to me that it really is true. In class we came up with many different examples of places where people with disabilities spend their days that maintain the expectations that we hold. When you spend most of your time at the mall doing nothing but window shopping, it communicates an image of a wasted life, thereby maintaining that expectation. However, if you work at the mall as an associate attendant, it communicates something completely different. The more I realize this, the more I am

passionate about helping people find a meaningful, satisfying role. If all one does is spend every minute of one's life with paid staff, there is less likelihood that a strong mutual relationship will be formed. These ideas are all central to what I believe. I am a strong social justice advocate who believes in the achievement of individual freedom. This view shapes the way I will approach role creation in my future place of employment.

Competency Enhancement

This theme was very important as well. I believe that if people are to gain valued social roles in society, they must develop the competencies needed to perform in those roles. It is no longer good enough to just teach people life skills, but rather a combination of life skills and competency enhancement. If you are a secretary at an office, you need to know how to attend to clients and visitors to your company. In *Best Kept Secret*, Ms. M might have been very committed to helping her students gain a meaningful life, but she failed to teach them more than what they already knew, which caused a regression in their competencies. If we are to truly create an environment where people can be successful, we need to focus on looking at people in a holistic manner rather than just the parts that need to be puzzled together. We miss the big picture while we are busy looking for one part of the puzzle. I am definitely confident that the less we focus on the non-programmatic issues, the more successful we will be in helping people develop and grow in the most natural settings.

The Developmental Model

I think the idea of model coherency can have a huge impact on how we approach this aspect of social role valorization. As Darcy said, if we start by looking at the people that we work for and understand who they are, we are more likely to be providing services that are relevant to them. I completely agree with this. People are not stone; their needs cannot be met if

you do not understand who they are. We also need to focus on how we deliver what they need. Are we delivering it in a manner that is coherent with who they are? Focusing on optimizing the growth of all the people we work for is paramount. We offer a preconceived notion of individual capabilities while justifying it with well-meaning intentions. It has to be a conscious decision. We have to realize that no one is limited to anything; we are constantly developing and growing and such development cannot be perceived as a static agent.

Relevancy, Potency and Model Coherency

In the previous theme, I revealed up a bit about my understanding and thoughts on model coherency. Therefore, I will entertain that topic less under this theme. To me relevancy is the glue that holds everything together. If what we are offering is relevant to what people need, it is more likely to lead to a more meaningful life. I think in some agencies they fail to realize that the needs of the people they work for should be met by the services they are providing. They offer a generic service under a systems-thinking approach. Essentially, a “This is what we offer. Take it or leave it” approach. As a result, their effectiveness in helping people gain a holistic, meaningful life is limited. In some cases, it is not the relevancy of the services they offer that is in question, but the potency; is what they offer enough? I have been to many group homes where the services are clearly not meeting the needs of the individual they serve or, if it was meeting their needs, they were not getting enough of it. So really ensuring that we are taking the most effective and result goal minded approach is important to ensuring relevancy.

Power of Imitation

Imitation is extremely important to me when it comes to helping people develop valued social roles. When opportunities are afforded to people to learn in a natural environment, I think that is when growth and accomplishment are truly visible. I think that because we all are born

with the ability to imitate and the need to, it provides a mutual opportunity for both the role model and the learner to connect. It offers a powerful opportunity for growth and development. That is why I find it extremely important that the people who work in this field be extremely dedicated and a good example of a role model. One thing that I see all the time in a group home is workers who smoke with the individual they work for. These workers are fully aware of the person's goal to stop or reduce smoking, yet they will be the one to ask if they want to go for a smoke. I find this very problematic because it often sends the wrong message to the person when another staff member comes in and does not smoke. The previous expectation of having someone to smoke with is no longer there. We have to be clear about how role modeling can affect people directly. On the other hand, we often see people who bring a balanced diet to work for supper every day as well.

Interpersonal Identification

I agree with this premise as well. As I said earlier, I mostly associate with people who think like me. Using that same premise, I can conclude that when people associate with me, they are more likely to want to support me and help me accomplish a good life. On that same premise, we can say that helping people achieve valued social roles gives them the opportunity to meet people who share other things in common. Although I am not sure if I agree with the idea that people need to be approachable to share a similar interest with other people, what I do agree with is that when people are presentable, they are more likely to be associated with. As Darcy said, we all have people that we consult after getting dressed before we leave home. We should be willing to offer our suggestions in a constructive manner. If people associate with a club or team, they should be given opportunities to attend those events. I have seen many examples of how amazing

this has worked for an individual that I worked with last summer. As a result of people being able to associate with him, he now has friends with whom he goes to the baseball game.

Social Imagery

This theme is very critical when helping people develop “valued social identity”. The fact that images can communicate so much with very little spoken information is powerful. I am always very conscious of the way that I present myself, because people often associate certain things with me. The juxtaposing of images, either negative or positive, with people is a powerful way to send a strong message of what role they play in society. For example, I was at BestBuy yesterday and an elderly man came to me and said, “You are albino.” I was tempted to say, “I am not albino; my name is Kazeem.” I decided to indulge him in a conversation that revealed so much about the image media has placed in his mind. I was very happy that I did interact with him because it offered me a critical perspective about the negative ideas and assumptions attached to my skin color. While I would like to blame his ignorance for some of the outrageous assumptions he had, I could not, because we all have such assumptions on different issues. Images can help shape people’s perceptions of worth and value. What is often more desirable is what society might consider favorable to the majority. Images can be used as one of the major tools in shaping people’s perceptions of devalued people. I personally cannot understand why we often get stuck on a particular imagery about people and what roles they must occupy in society.

Personal, Social Integration and Valued Social Participation

One of the things I alluded to earlier is a good example of poor integration in the classroom. On many levels, when adequate resources are not available for teachers or support workers; when inadequate or no support is given to people in the classroom; when students are

placed in a classroom that is not designed to meet their needs then we have poor social integration. The notion of a specialized classroom (something that I often talk about) is not what I consider integration. When I graduated from high school, I could say that I had never met many of the people I graduated with, yet I was considered to be integrated. That is a good example of what is mistaken as integration in the school system. Integration is used in so many contexts where it should not even be referred to. What I consider to be integration is the ability to connect with other students in the classroom; the ability to connect with people in your community. When people are well integrated, it offers them protection in ways that poor integration does not guaranteed. When you have people who care about you, people who want to see nothing go wrong for you, there is less likelihood of abuse occurring. I remember Darcy's story of how her daughter was protected from abusive EA. If she was not in a regular classroom doing what other students are doing, I just cannot imagine how long the abuse could have gone on without someone realizing it. The specialized classroom really works against the student because there is less emphasis on competency development. In my experience, many special classrooms do not offer a rich educational experience in ways that integrated classrooms do. If people are to gain valued roles in society, they need to be in the community doing things that regular people do; they need to be in a classroom that is suited to all learners of different backgrounds.

How I Will Use SRV in My Future Jobs

I plan on working with people with albinism and disability upon completion of my degree. I am confident that this theory will help shape my practice in a way never before considered. How my unconscious assumptions might impact the people that I am working for is one thing that I will be mindful of. My goal is to help people gain a meaningful life and be a valued member of their community. With this assertion, I believe the themes of social role

valorization will be at the heart of my practice. Integration is one thing that I hope to champion. In other words, I will work to advocate true inclusion at post-secondary and elementary levels in Nigeria. I will work with people to help them discover their own voice and their identity in society. I will work to ensure that the services that we offer are relevant to people and are potent enough. My organization will ensure that the models are coherent. For me, it boils down to really understanding the people that I work for so that trust can be built. When trust is built, we can then begin to look at what is available for typical people of their age group in the community. These ideas will form the bases of my future practice.