

## **Roles, identities, and expectancies: Positive contributions to Normalization and Social Role Valorization**

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### **1 INTRODUCTION**

In 1982, Steve Tullman and Wolf Wolfensberger reformulated the Normalization principle, stating that Normalization hinged upon the attributions of valued social roles to otherwise devalued individuals and classes of people. It was “the insight that the creation of valued social roles for people at risk of social devaluation was the epitome of Normalization” (Wolfensberger, 1983, p. 237). A year later Wolfensberger concluded that this new formulation was such a drastic departure from traditional Normalization theory that he decided, for a variety of reasons, to rename the principle and push even further its relationship to role theory. Thus it is the access to valued roles that will enable individuals to have access to the good things in life (Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1994).

This new direction in theorizing has led to some confusion and also to a great deal of debate. For some this has meant that Social Role Valorization (SRV) is a more reductionist formulation than Wolfensberger’s (1972) classic Normalization definition.

From the beginning, North American Normalization and to a lesser extent Scandinavian Normalization have always made some reference to role concepts. But with SRV, roles have become the focal point of the definition as well as the defining term included in its name. Some of the confusion undoubtedly stems from the fact that Wolfensberger calls into play a vast new

area of research and theorizing that up until now has remained virtually unknown for SRV and Normalization aficionados.

The following aims to chart Normalization’s and SRV’s historical relationship with role theory, to selectively review the considerable work that has gone on over the past years in the realms of sociology and social psychology that has been termed “social role theory.”

This review will also attempt to answer some very basic questions that will hopefully inform the ongoing debate concerning SRV’s new formulation and its research, practice, and training implications.

1. Is SRV’s reference to role theory in keeping with the formulations now present in social science literature? Is Wolfensberger’s use of the terms “role” and “social roles” in keeping with the current definitions found in the literature of psychology and sociology, or is his use idiosyncratic? At the outset, though, Wolfensberger’s own claims to theory building should lead us to believe that he is here, in the new SRV synthesis, speaking of role theory as it is generally accepted in the social sciences literature.

2. Does social science research and theorizing support SRV’s contention that social roles are fundamental? Do social roles, for instance, have an effect upon positive or negative valuation and one’s access to the good things in life? Does the literature support that the attribution of positive roles is the way to assuring the valorization of the individual and should

therefore be the end and means of human service endeavor? Does role theory and do social roles have the conceptual breadth and power to subsume all that is, on the one hand, the experience of devaluation, and on the other, the possibility and strategy of redressing that which we agree is a great social wrong? Do other researchers and theorists share Wolfensberger's view that social roles can play an important conceptual role in building a theory of psychosocial intervention?

## 2 EARLY REFERENCES TO SOCIAL ROLES IN THE LITERATURE ON NORMALIZATION

### 2.1 ROLES IN THE 1969 BOOK *CHANGING PATTERNS IN RESIDENTIAL SERVICES FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED*

The term "roles" and the concepts associated with social roles are almost entirely absent from the Scandinavian formulations of Normalization (e.g., Nirje, 1969; Bank-Mikkelsen, 1969). Though these early articles give the impression of individuals and groups having things done to them and for them, from a roles perspective one can reread these articles and see how roles fit between the lines, so to speak. By having access to a normal rhythm of day and normal routine of life, the attribution of certain roles are certainly assumed. Being in one's home assumes that one would be at least a resident or tenant, if not a homeowner. Participating in leisure time activities would make one a player, or at least a participant. Certainly Nirje (1969) proposes that mentally retarded individuals should have sex roles and of course that their roles should be related to their chronological ages, and he also raises the notion of roles in the context of employment or vocational services.

From the beginning, social roles have been highlighted in North American Normalization. The 1969 *Changing Patterns in Residential Services for the Mentally Retarded* (Kugel & Wolfensberger, 1969), which first gave prominence to Normalization, also included Wolfensberger's (1969) "Origin and Nature of Our Institutional Models," which, among other things, surveyed the negative historical roles that defined the lives of devalued classes of individuals. Wolfensberger gave a far-reaching exposition on how these roles were created and then maintained by complex feedback systems that included stereotypes and expectancies,

which were conveyed by language and physical environments. In his 1969 monograph, Wolfensberger had only one specific positive role to propose for mentally retarded individuals, and that was of the role of a "developing individual."

*Changing Patterns* contained many important contributions by some of the then leading lights in the social sciences and services to persons with mental retardation. Few of the authors make more than a passing reference to "roles" and then usually in relation to work. Seymour Sarason (1969), who later became president of the American Psychological Association, wrote a suggestive article about the problems of creating healthy settings that echoed Wolfensberger's discussion on the "meaning of a building." Sarason tied his discussion on settings to Blatt and Kaplan's (1966) pictorial essay *Christmas in Purgatory*, which graphically described the scandalous failure of contemporary settings by concluding: "if one thinks that defective children are almost beyond help, one acts toward them in ways which confirm one's assumptions" (p. 7). This evocation of expectancy effects is very suggestive of role theory, to which it is intimately tied.

Gunnar Dybwad (1969), in his concluding "overview" chapter, lists the necessary changes that needed to be brought about to renovate the residential service system for mentally retarded adults and children. Echoing Wolfensberger, Sarason, and Blatt, he proposes that one of the great obstacles to change is "the societal role perception of Retardates as deviants" (p. 391).

### 2.2 ROLES IN THE 1972 BOOK *THE PRINCIPLE OF NORMALIZATION IN HUMAN SERVICES*

The 1972 book *The Principle of Normalization in Human Services*, which has recently been identified as the most classic work in the field of mental retardation (Heller, Spooner, Enright, Haney, & Schilit, 1991), has had a tremendous influence on human services. It is with this book that Normalization becomes inextricably linked with social roles and role theory.

In his discussions of ideology, Wolfensberger (1972) speaks of combinations of beliefs, attitudes, and interpretations of reality that have derived from one's experiences, one's knowledge of what are presumed to be facts, and, above all, one's values. Interestingly, the whole notion of roles subsumes this notion of ideology

in the sense that roles are, by and large, culture-bound and constrained by the very same dynamics that make up ideology. Prior to this definition of ideology, Wolfensberger speaks much of the role of human service manager and how much power and control is wielded, though unconsciously, through this role. Later he suggests that ideology can lead one to view the mentally retarded as menaces to society, thus dramatically altering the relationship between the “managers” and the helpes. The important insight here, upon which the future edifice of SRV will be built, was that roles are one of the important and ubiquitous means for transacting ideology and particularly devaluation.

In chapter 2 of the 1972 Normalization book, Wolfensberger explains deviancy in terms of roles: “When a person is perceived as deviant, he is cast into a role that carries with it powerful expectancies” (p. 15). In this chapter Wolfensberger summarizes the then eight historical roles of deviancy. Here, his discussion of roles and role expectations is classical, explaining it as a feedback mechanism affecting both perceiver and perceived. The first North American formulation of the Normalization principle speaks to the issue of roles, if only in an indirect way, by proposing that culturally normative means be used “to establish and/or maintain personal behaviors and characteristics which are as culturally normative as possible” (p. 28). Certainly roles are about behaviors and characteristics. The missing element in this first formulation is the relationship factor whereby one understands that the behaviors and characteristics of individuals are most often expressed in social (and physical) contexts in relation to other people and settings.

The issue of roles becomes even clearer in chapters 4 and 6 of the Normalization book, where Wolfensberger addresses the issue of programmatic and architectural implications of the Normalization principle. Interestingly, he divided the implications into two dimensions. The interaction dimension and the interpretation dimension, which resemble very closely the feedback loop system in classical definitions of social roles, where interpretations are vehicles for beliefs and stereotypes and as such create expectancies and where interactions provide the opportunities for role attribution and for skill acquisition. In fact, he invokes many of the concepts that are quite close to

role theory, such as stereotypes, role perceptions, and role expectancies, as well as making clear that even architecture can convey strong role expectancies. Moreover, he shows that these dimensions are active on three levels: the person level, the intermediate social system level, and, finally, the societal level. Once again, this echoes fairly closely the classical descriptions of role theory that operate on individuals in small groups through societally broad mechanisms (Biddle, 1979; Newcomb, Turner, & Converse, 1975; Thomas & Biddle, 1966).

In his chapter on mental health and Normalization, Wolfensberger (1970) states: “if role expectancy is as powerful as we believe we know it to be then it should be manipulated consciously and/or systematically, rather than unconsciously and/or haphazardly, as is typically the case now” (p. 104). One also finds an early discussion of the client role where it is sketched as inspired by the “developmental-Normalization model” and shown as an alternative to the sick role of the medical model. Wolfensberger also develops the notion of “developmental” role perceptions in his chapter on the profoundly retarded, stating “we must endeavour that, with the aid of our services, the handicapped attain their potential, and we must formulate roles for them that discourage dependency and encourage growth” (Wolfensberger, 1972, p. 132).

Simon Olshansky (1972), in his article on changing vocational behavior through Normalization, states that “industry has little interest in hiring clients; it wants workers who can function as workers. It has little patience or tolerance of workers sliding into the role of clients. And even though some large employers are beginning to offer some clinical services, many workers interpret them as a public relations deception” (p. 156). His discussion of the workshop is one of roles and role expectancies and how one should create the expectancy for work and the worker role. Wolfensberger (1972) also provides an interesting discussion of sociosexual roles of the severely impaired in his chapter on sociosexual needs. In it, one would find a very frank discussion on what these roles are in the culture and the barriers to having them transacted for persons who are severely handicapped.

It is clear that from the outset, at least for the North American formulation, role theory was a pervasive influence. Interestingly, it is almost absent in the

discussion on physical and social integration in the Normalization book of 1972. This suggests that up until then, the theorists of the movement had not pushed the connection to its ultimate conclusion. The connections of Normalization to role theory continued to evolve over the years, especially in the various training formats and teaching modules that were developed by Wolfensberger and his colleagues.

### 3 SRV'S ASSERTIONS CONCERNING SOCIAL ROLE THEORY

"The Social Role may be defined as a socially expected pattern of behaviors, responsibilities, expectations and privileges" (Wolfensberger, 1992, p. 13). People learn the expected responsibilities of a role through a "feedback loop between role expectations and role performances" (p. 13). Persons may enter into social roles through choice, because of their competencies or by imposition. Wolfensberger goes on to propose that different roles have different "bandwidths," which he defines in terms of time (for instance, the work role taking up 35 hours in a week and therefore being relatively important) and of location, occasion, and possibilities of manifestation. As an example, he points to the difference between the role of spouse, which is very broad and allows for many manifestations across many settings, and the role of customer, which is manifested in relatively fewer locations.

In SRV, all of this is tied in parallel to the notions of valuation and devaluation, which are an evaluative comment on things and persons and are a product of the human perceptual process. These social judgments are formed through a complex filtering of the human perceptual process. Thus, an observer is deeply influenced by various factors:

- a) The observer's own characteristics and experiences including expectations from previous contacts with observed persons or group.
- b) Characteristics of observer's physical environment, e.g., deprivation, stress.
- c) Characteristics of the observer's social environment, e.g., values, expectations, norms and conventions.
- d) What is actually observed, i.e., another person/group appearance, e.g., red hair, behavior,

etc. (Wolfensberger, 1992, p. 16).

Wolfensberger points out that when the stigmata of impairment is observed, it will have a definite impact upon the evaluative judgment of the observer, especially if there is concordance between the role behavior observed, the impairments observed, and the observer's own stereotypic beliefs and prior experience. Despite this, Wolfensberger proposes that roles may be more powerful than impairments. "Some roles are stronger than impairments in shaping the attitudes of the observers." Early, he had stated that some roles become embedded in one's identity, and then, "roles are so powerful that they largely define who we are, what we do and with whom we act, even what we wear" (p. 20).

In *The Origin and Nature of Institutional Models*, Wolfensberger (1969) made the point that persons with impairments often had historically embedded negative stereotypic deviancy roles attributed to them. But with the SRV monograph (Wolfensberger, 1992), he goes on to propose that valued social roles can neutralize the impact of impairments and afflictions or even capitalize upon them. Thus, "people who are accorded positive roles despite their impairments, can lead almost totally integrated, highly valued, productive and full lives" (1992, p. 29). Valued roles, therefore, will provide persons with positive opportunities that will in turn promote competency enhancement and finally, afford the person "the good things of life" (p. 34). The attribution of valued roles, or as Wolfensberger states it "the enablement, establishment, enhancement, maintenance, and/or defence of valued social roles for people" (p. 32), can be the necessary corrective to social devaluation, and thus the essence of psychosocial intervention.

Two major strategies stand as "avenues to valued social roles" (p. 34). These are competency enhancement, and image enhancement, which, in essence, is the creation of positive attitudes by the enhancement of social image

so that they (the impaired persons) will be more positively perceived by others, and others will therefore be more inclined to extend to them valued roles . . . and the enhancement of their competencies, so that they will be better able to fill certain valued roles, and so that valued roles which require certain competencies can be accorded to them (p. 34).

In a sense, SRV, and the last formulation of

Normalization, are not such a radical departure, and in hindsight it is only natural that the formulation evolved as it did.

However, Wolfensberger's claims concerning social roles are largely unsubstantiated through the traditional method of referring to the relevant and up-to-date literature. Thus, his theoretical model, though intuitively appealing, is nonetheless open to question. Moreover, his theoretical version of social role theory seems, at first glance, to be largely based on the work of one sociological theorist—Talcott Parsons (1951)—and is now more than 40 years old. Do any of these claims have any empirical support?

## 4 LIMITATIONS OF ROLE THEORY

### 4.1 ROLES: METAPHOR OR REALITY

When we refer to roles, we often think of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, and the famous soliloquy "All the world is a stage." It is, for instance, Wolfensberger's (1969) introductory quote to his exposition on the historical deviancy roles. Rosenthal and Jacobson, in their 1968 book *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, also refer to the theater, and George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, where Henry Higgins builds a new role set for Eliza Doolittle, thus making the "guttersnipe" flower girl into a "lady" who will be able to fit and participate in high society. The analogy between the theater and social life goes back at least to Greek antiquity, in which the Stoics saw the world as a stage where each person played a role ordained and scripted by the gods (Rocheblave-Spenlé, 1962). These foremost references to the theater, as well as the theater's use of the terms "role," "scripts," and others means oftentimes that readers conclude that there is something disingenuous, contrived, or metaphorical about roles (Lemay, 1994).

The theater, of course, is the metaphor for life, not the other way around (Riggins, 1993). In the theater, the concept of role is used to organize the one-dimensional figure played on a stage. A role represents one person, a character, played according to a script and in relationship to other actors also playing scripted roles. Of course, the actor is successful if his rendering of the role is plausible according to what we, the audience, would expect and predict.

But the roles people play in everyday life are

incredibly different. We do not play one role but many in any given day, and we must stand on many stages. La Fontaine (Rocheblave-Spenlé, 1962), recognizing this, writes in his *Fables* that life is "une comédie à cent actes divers et dont la scène est l'univers." Real life "scripts" are conveyed by expectations, stereotypes, beliefs, and attitudes (including our own) thus providing an incredibly broad set of possibilities that allows us a great deal of spontaneity and idiosyncrasy in our expression of roles (Newcomb, Turner, & Converse, 1975). Of course, we don't think of ourselves as playing roles. We think of ourselves in different situations and of being ourselves, and yet the regularities of behavior that exist from day to day and between persons who are in similar situations has led the common man to express in the vernacular that which is commonly used and understood by all. In this sense, roles are also how the common folk have come to understand the very same regularities and structures that have occurred to social scientists. It should not be surprising that the common folk can come up with parsimonious explanations for social phenomena.

But this use of the common language also means that some will too quickly come to a superficial understanding of role theory without sufficiently studying the great complexity of the concept (Lemay, 1996a). In a sense, role theory suffers from the same confusions that plagued Normalization (e.g., Perrin & Nirje, 1985; Wolfensberger, 1980). The terms "role," "identity," "expectation," and many others commonly used by role theorists, are, like Normalization, imbued with much surplus meaning. For instance, Biddle (1979) found that the term "expectation" had been given to at least a score of very different concepts and that the concept of "a covertly held prescriptive expectation has received at least 15 different names in theoretical studies and more than twice that number in empirical research" (p. 14). But where the confusions about Normalization were not without unfortunate consequences for its purported beneficiaries, the confusions about role theory exist mostly among scientists who have trouble eschewing the rich surplus meanings of its terminology in their search for exact scientific and empirically verifiable definitions. In many ways, it is the "surplus" meanings of role language that make them so relevant and useful to our understanding of the person and his social situation. For SRV, this should not be seen as an impediment.

Rather, role theory's use of the vernacular to express scientific concepts is in keeping with SRV's phenomenological *parti pris*. It is thus a language that is close to experience and readily understandable in a broad sense.

#### 4.2 THEORETICAL CONFUSION OR AN ABUNDANCE OF RICHES

In his 1986 review article on role theory, Bruce Biddle states that there are five main perspectives on role theory.

- 1) Functional role theory (Parsons, 1951), where roles are conceived as the shared normative expectations that prescribe and explain these behaviors (p. 70).
- 2) Symbolic interactionist theory (Mead, 1934), which is "the evolution of roles through social interaction in various cognitive concepts through which social actors understand and interpret their own and others' conduct" (Biddle, 1986, p. 71).
- 3) Structural role theory, which makes much of mathematical models and which focuses more on social structure than on individual behaviors.
- 4) Organizational role theory, which applies role theory to business and industrial organization and sees most if not all problems as role conflicts.
- 5) Cognitive role theory, of which Biddle is an ardent exponent, which basically studies the relationship between expectations and behavior.

These theorists argue quite strenuously among themselves about the apparent inconsistencies in their varied approaches (Biddle, 1979; Hilbert, 1981). On the one hand, it is argued that roles and identities account for behavioral regularities and apparent stability of social structure. On the other hand, there seems to be an incredible amount of variability between persons playing the same roles—even in the same settings—having the same identities, and even between the identities and the roles of a single person (Biddle, 1986; Hilbert, 1981; Newcomb, Turner, & Converse, 1975). These confusions, or debates, that are present in scientific social science literature, are due mostly to important epistemological differences between the various theorists (Biddle, 1979). Some argue that roles are merely "objects of perception" (Morgan & Schwalbe, 1990). For others, role theory is of necessity a narrow reductionistic notion that lends itself very well to empirical research. For others still, role theory is an incredibly broad and inclusive phenomenon that

is used in speculative theory building (Morgan & Schwalbe, 1990; Biddle, 1986) but lends itself less well to number crunching (Biddle, 1986).

#### 4.3 ROLE THEORY, SRV, AND FUNCTIONALISM

Though Wolfensberger gives credit to Talcott Parsons (1951) for first formalizing role theory, many other important theorists were at it years earlier. George Herbert Mead (1934) expounded at length on the importance of the subject and Bruce Biddle (1986) gives reference to Ralph Linton (1936), Jacob Moreno (1934), and G. Simmel (1920). In her sweeping review of role theory, Rocheblave-Spenlé (1962) traces role theory back to G. Tarde and his 1888 book *Les lois de l'imitation*, Émile Durkheim's 1893 *De la division du travail social* and Alfred Binet's 1900 work *La suggestibilité*. Moreover, Wolfensberger's own version of role theory has little in common with Parsons's functionalist version, which unsatisfactorily emphasizes the stability of social systems and the conformity of role performance. The functionalist perspective is now by and large discredited, but its early association to role theory continues to debilitate role theory's reputation (Biddle, 1986). Wolfensberger's possibly unfortunate reference to Parsons and role theory's historical association to functionalism might explain why some critics accuse North American Normalization of being authoritarian in that it supposedly proposes conformity (Perrin & Nirje, 1985; Szivos, 1992) or that it is a functionalist theory (Chappell, 1992). In any event, the influences on SRV are much too wide and varied for it to be so easily nutshelled. Certainly Wolfensberger's (see chapter 3) early reliance on Goffman's (1961) social analysis of "total institutions" and description of role theory, and SRV's treatment of imagery (Thomas & Wolfensberger, 1982/1994) would suggest that SRV is at the very least sympathetic to symbolic interactionism.

According to Biddle's (1986) review of the interactionist perspective, this version of role theory stresses

the evolution of roles through social interaction, and various cognitive concepts, through which social actors understand and interpret their own and others' conduct . . . norms are said to provide merely a set of broad imperatives within which the details of roles can be worked out (p. 71).

According to Morgan and Schwalbe (1990), "the

evolving interactionist approach is more cognitive and offers better opportunities to sociology and social psychology for understanding how social structure and social cognition are linked” (p. 148). Thus, this version of role theory provides a dynamic and complex conceptualization that captures the experiential aspects of social interaction from the perspective of the perceiver (Turner, 1978) and the perceived (Thoits, 1983; Stryker, 1987). Role theory from its interactionist perspective accounts for, among other things, beliefs, stereotypes, and attitudes; norms, contextual demands, and expectations; and identity and self-concept.

Biddle’s criticism of the symbolic interactionist approach to role theory rests primarily in the broadness of its ambition and its sometimes “fuzzy” language and definitions, which do not lend themselves well to empirical research.

## 5 STRENGTHS OF ROLE THEORY

### 5.1 THE BROAD APPLICABILITY OF ROLE THEORY

Bruce Biddle points out in his 1986 review article that social roles are one of the most popular ideas in sociology and one of the most popular ideas in the social sciences. “At least 10% of all articles currently published in sociological journals use the term role in a technical sense” (p. 67). Biddle, taking up a point made by a number of theorists (Rocheblave-Spenlé, 1962), goes on to suggest that role theory is the nexus between anthropology, psychology, and sociology. Other researchers and theorists (Eagly, 1987; Morgan & Schwalbe, 1990; Turner, 1988) also make the case that both sociology and social psychology are improved by their use of role theory. As we have seen, the social role concept seems to be well embedded in social science theorizing. Social role theory has engendered a great deal of theoretical work and seems to be of prime importance in explaining human behavior from the individual up and the social structure down. Thomas and Biddle (1966) concluded in their review that “Role concepts are not the lingua franca of the behavioral sciences, but perhaps they presently come closer to this universal language than any other vocabulary of behavioral science” (p. 8).

As used by social scientists, roles are a fundamental tool of analysis that helps explain apparent regularities of behavior and the structure of social systems (Biddle,

1979, 1986; Newcomb, Turner, & Converse, 1975). Roles are thus an organizing concept of great usefulness.

Role theory concerns one of the most important features of social life, characteristic behavior patterns or roles. It explains roles by presuming that persons are members of social position and hold expectations for their own behaviors and those of other persons” (Biddle, 1986, p. 67).

Importantly, Biddle notes that role theory has led to very few derivations or utilizations. This is not to say that role theory has not been used in the past to generate possible practical utilizations. George Kelly (1955/1963) constructed his own social role theory and put it to use both as a diagnostic tool and as a therapeutic technique where people were called upon to script new roles for themselves. Jacob L. Moreno (Moreno, 1989) also developed his own version of role therapy and called it “psychodrama,” where the therapy included the acting out rather than reporting of problems by clients and other persons who were in role relationships with them.

### 5.2 SOCIAL ROLES ARE INTIMATELY TIED TO PHENOMENOLOGICAL REALITY

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) in his *Ecology of Human Development* makes the point that the concept of roles and phenomenology are tied together in the work of a number of theorists in both psychology and sociology. Roles are not only about perceived behaviors or position, but just as important, roles are about a person’s perception of a given situation and his self-conception within that situation. Roles are perceived by others and experienced by the incumbent.

It is not surprising that the language of roles has a great deal of everydayness about it

Roles occur in everyday life, of course, and are of concern to those who perform them and others. Children are constantly enjoined to act in a more grown up fashion; new recruits into the armed services must learn roles of deference and deportment.” (Biddle, 1979, p. 57)

Newcomb, Turner, & Converse (1975) had previously made a similar observation

As we pursue our daily round of activities, we are called on to take a remarkable succession of roles. Within a few hours, we are likely to be called on to

switch back and forth between the different role behavior required as students, as roommates, as sons or daughters, as church members, as dates, as discussion group leaders, and the like.” (p. 393)

Moreover, as was noted above, many of the terms and concepts that surround role theory are taken from the common language (Biddle, 1979), thus, the experience of roles and the self-realization that one plays roles is such that a repertoire of words are readily available in the vernacular to build a theory. This is of particular importance when one considers SRV’s foundation upon a phenomenological view of the life experiences of devalued classes of people. This might explain Wolfensberger’s seeming eschewance of empirical support in favor of descriptive vignettes or illustrative stories to support his propositions. This theory-building, based as it is on a terminology embedded in the vernacular, suggests that scientific theorizing can thus be productive and even possibly more meaningful since it relates directly to everyday experience and, as we shall see, also lends itself to empirical review and support.

Just a cursory review of research themes shows an impressive relationship between social role theory and day-to-day life experiences. Thus we find role research on identity and self-conception; personality; the person and role person merger; health and well-being; stress reduction and social support; status, social position, social participation, social structure, and predictability and regularity of behavior; variation in behavior; sex differences, differences in helping behaviors and aggression; leadership, positive, and negative attitudes.

There is a profound consonance also between role and self-conception. From this perspective, roles are an essential component of our regular day-to-day lives. We assume roles, live our lives in a variety of roles, and make them ours. George Herbert Mead (1934) pointed out that we learn and practice the intricacies of role taking and role play as children when we interact with imaginary companions or play at being mother, father, police officer, soldier, or great athlete. These games are a natural part of development and do not strike us in any way as being contrived in the sense of a theater role. The role-playing game is a more formal rendering of imitation or practice of what has been learned from a model. This capacity to “try” on such roles is not limited to children but occurs also with adults, as has been demonstrated spectacularly in

Zimbardo’s prison experiments (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973) and Milgram’s (1974) obedience experiments. Thus from early on and throughout our lives, roles are inextricably tied to our existence in a natural spontaneity that is altogether unconscious in the sense that we do not conceive of ourselves as playing a role but rather of being a role (e.g., a father, a mother, a nurse, a customer, etc.).

One might speculate that the role play of children predates even the most primitive theater forms; very possibly the first “plays” were adult renderings of child’s play, if not nostalgic yearnings for them. In any event there is a conceptual richness about the vernacular version of roles that goes way beyond any scientific theorizing. The fuzzy folk notion is more comprehensive and satisfying than the effort to extract from it a precise and exact, and thus limiting, scientific idea (Lemay, 1994). Role theory’s reliance on terms taken from the common language allows for both the expression of the concrete experiences of subjects and the “abstract notions of investigators” (Biddle, 1976, p. 12).

Role theory, concerned as it is with individuals in context, is a positive solution to Seymour Sarason’s (1981) criticism that an ambitious psychology, searching as it were to become a “hard” science, arbitrarily separates the individual from society for purposes of research, theory, and intervention, thus leaving it bankrupt. Individuals are inseparable from their relationships, such as when Newcomb, Turner, and Converse (1975) describe the mother-child relationship as “two halves of the same habit” (p. 7). Role theory provides a useful gestalt that allows us to identify, label, and thus understand that with which we perceive and that which we experience: living among and with others.

## **6 THE DEVALUATION HYPOTHESIS: GROUP ROLES AND STEREOTYPES**

Wolfensberger and Thomas (1994) and McKnight (1995), among others, have written about the inescapability of societal devaluation and how these are economic and social phenomena that have little or no bearing on individual differences. For instance, in a postprimary production economy, which is mostly based on human service, if there are to be persons who play professional server roles, then there are bound to be individuals who will play client roles. Thus in this

sense, the employment of some requires the dependency of others. This suggests that there are finite numbers of positive roles to go around and thus Social Role Valorization will only work for relatively small groups at any given time and will require that other groups take their place in lower status social positions unless profound societal changes occur that democratize the value of roles.

An interesting source that can be used to provide some empirical support for this view is available in the work of ecological psychologists. Roger Barker and his colleagues (Barker, 1968; Barker & Wright, 1954; see also Wicker, 1979) in their field studies of American midwest life found that in any given context, the number of social positions or roles is finite and in similar types of settings this number is something of a constant. There are only so many roles to go around, and the fewer people there are, the more roles they each have to fill. He and his colleagues applied this finding to a variety of settings including churches (Wicker, 1969) and most famously in Barker and Gump's (1964) study *Big School, Small School*, where the principle of "undermanning" was demonstrated. Undermanning theory proposes that small settings offer greater opportunities of participation and integration. Overmanned settings leave many individuals with few and possibly no roles to play, other than passive (spectator) or even negative roles. Wicker (1973) speculated that as the population of a community increases, more people are left out, and those who are given roles to play are selected, among other things, on the basis of competence. In undermanned settings, persons are recruited into roles mostly based on availability, and competence is less important. There are interesting practice and research issues that are suggested by these findings that could be useful in the area of social integration.

## 6.1 DEVALUED ROLES

As mentioned above, SRV's emphasis on positively valued social roles grew out of the historical analysis of deviancy roles (Wolfensberger, 1969) and the conclusion that such dynamics are still, by and large, present and at work in modern society. "People who are devalued by their society get cast by their society into roles that are societally devalued. In other words, the person is given a role identity that confirms and

justifies society's ascription of low value or worth to the person" (Wolfensberger, 1992, p. 10). Though most of the debate concerning roles has occurred in relation to its purported fundamentality to valorization, the existing evidence supporting devaluation thesis could be of importance. There are three component parts to the role devaluation thesis. First, roles can be life defining, and when such roles are negative they can have devastating consequences for individuals. Second, some roles, including negative ones, have been systematically ascribed to groups or classes of individuals. Finally, many group roles are perpetuated by relatively robust stereotypes that shape the attendant attitudes of role incumbents and others in the social environment.

### 6.1.1 LIFE DEFINING ROLES

Some roles are so important that they are life defining. Thomas and Wolfensberger (1994) provided compelling arguments for the pervasive impact of the client role, especially on devalued individuals. Though the client role is open to all, it is expressed in valued ways for valued individuals (e.g., being the client of the stockbroker), but much less so when one is poor and thus very dependent for a very long period of time on a variety of human services. Thomas and Wolfensberger's description of the career client role is in many ways reminiscent of Goffman's (1961) description of the career of mental patient. Moreover, Wolfensberger argues that since for devalued persons, the client role is pervasive—it is the role that fills the most time—and that other roles are secondary and few in number, the client role becomes particularly defining, offering the individual fewer opportunities for learning skills associated with other roles and for being perceived as being able to learn the required skills for such roles.

This argumentation is very similar to Eagly and Johnson's (1990) discussion on the apparent sex differences in the behavior of organizational leaders, which are possibly the "product of the differing structural positions of the sexes within organizations" (p. 234). Like Thomas and Wolfensberger's client role, the pervasive influence of gender roles was found throughout a series of secondary roles by Eagly and her colleagues especially in situations where the role demands were ambiguous and where the gender roles would be particularly important in informing the role occupant on how he or she should

behave. These results were found in relation to helping behavior (Eagly & Crowley, 1986), leadership style (Eagly & Johnson, 1990), and aggression (Eagly & Steffen, 1986). The above supports the notion that, for instance, the client role is primary for individuals who have few other important roles that occupy as much time and are as salient to their self-concept. Thus, their client role can be life determining and will have a pervasive influence on the performance of other roles, especially in equivocal situations.

Of particular interest to Wolfensberger's hypothesis on the client role is Eagly and Crowley's (1986) demonstration of the differences between the helping behaviors of men and women. As in the case of clienthood, the role of helper is open to all. But there are important differences between the helping behaviors and helping roles of men and those of women.

The beliefs that people hold about the differences between men and women can be summarized in terms of two dimensions, the communal and the agentic, both of which define positive, personal attributes. Communal gender stereotypic belief primarily describes a concern with the welfare of other people and women are believed to manifest this concern more strongly than men. The agentic dimension of gender stereotypic belief about personal qualities describes primarily an assertive and controlled tendency and men are believed to manifest this tendency more strongly than women. Gender roles thus cluster around these perceived qualities and provide the role occupant with opportunities for learning role competencies (p. 23).

It should not be surprising that, by and large, men and women internalize societal gender roles much in the same way that Thomas and Wolfensberger describe a person internalizing the client role because he is systematically provided with opportunities for performing the behaviors related to this role and then in turn "becoming" this role. It is a cyclical feedback process that is commonly known as the "self-fulfilling prophecy" made famous by the studies of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) (a term first coined by R. K. Merton, in 1948). Eagly's own work and other studies show that "higher status people are perceived as considerably more agentic than lower status people" (1986, p. 23). Women who are seen as being more communal are provided with communal role opportunities and little occasion for demonstrating agentic skills. Thus, one finds that women are likely to be employed in

positions that have relatively low status, little power, and limited opportunity for advancement. Eagly and Crowley also note that communal helping is related to subservience, hence its impact on social status. At least for women, the forms of helping are expressed as compliance and are thus unassertive. Assertive forms of help are in keeping with higher social status and are usually associated with the male gender role. Thus heroism, which is primarily agentic in nature, is especially associated to the male gender role, whereas the emotional support and informal counseling, which are nurturant and communal in nature, are mostly associated with the female gender role. It would not be surprising to find that valued persons express the client role in much more agentic ways than devalued persons, who would be more passive and submitting. Though one would probably be hard pressed to qualify this dimension as being communal, it is easy to see the commonalities between Wolfensberger's line of argumentation for the client roles of handicapped devalued persons and those presented by Eagly for female gender role.

#### 6.1.2 ROLES THAT ARE SYSTEMATICALLY ASCRIBED TO GROUPS OR CLASSES OF INDIVIDUALS

Wolfensberger maintains that there are roles that are systematically given to certain groups or classes of persons. There are, in fact, two parts to this argument, the first being that there are groups of individuals who hold similar positions, roles, beliefs, and attitudes that make them into identifiable groups and that these characteristics stand alone and apart from other visible physical characteristics. Second, certain roles are particularly reserved for these groups. This is Wolfensberger's (1992) latrine worker argument, where immigrant populations are given the down-and-dirty jobs that none of the higher status classes are willing to take on.

Related to the above, in reference to role theory and gender differences, Alice Eagly (1987) suggests that the value of role theory lies in its capacity to describe parsimoniously the predictors of differences between groups of people, in her research on sex differences.

According to this theory, the contemporaneous influences arising from adult social roles are more directly relevant to sex differences in adult social behavior than is prior socialization or biology. Social roles are regarded as the proximal predictors of adult sex differences, although these roles may be linked to other, more distal factors such as childhood

socialization pressures and biological predispositions (p. 9).

Early on, the eminent sociologist Peter Berger in his discussion of sociology (1963) affirms that human behavior and beliefs are particularly predictable within classes or groupings. It is these predictable behaviors and beliefs which in part lead to the creation of stereotypes. Thus value systems, religious and political affiliations, and vocational occupations are primarily a function of class, and in a pluralistic society, class acts as the magnet around which all of these cluster. It is interesting to note that Berger (1996) also affirms that in an upwardly mobile society, as the class of an ethnic group changes, so does its cluster of value systems, religious and political affiliations, and vocational occupations, thus the great unwashed—the eastern European Catholic immigrants who were the latrine cleaners of early 20th-century America—are now among the best educated and most upwardly mobile of its citizens.

Because of their nationality, gender, class, or impairment, classes of individuals may be systematically attributed certain roles and be subject to certain stereotypes and expectations. Peabody (1985) in his review of *National Characteristics* shows that Americans at least have a great deal of consensus on the different stereotypes that inform their perception of different nationalities. Moreover, gender role differences are so important that even here one may find important differences between the stereotypes held concerning Iranian women as opposed to Iranian men.

People's images of women and men of other nations should be affected by the relative status of the sexes in these nations. Because of men's higher status, they are disproportionately the protagonists of the observed events that foreigners use to form nationality stereotypes. Therefore, men should be perceived as possessing the attributes ascribed to their nationalities. In contrast, women should tend not to be perceived in terms of nationality stereotypes because women less often enact major roles in the highly publicized actions of their nations (p. 452).

The same could be said of classes of individuals who are marked by some form of impairment. Are there more commonalities between our stereotypes of, say, Iranian and British mentally retarded persons than about the typical citizens of these countries? If so, this is possible evidence that impairment stereotypes are of greater salience than national stereotypes.

### 6.1.3 STEREOTYPES

It is observable differences between groups and classes that lead to the formation of stereotypes. Early on, Donald Campbell (1967) argues that national stereotypes reflect the structural features of societies, e.g. agrarian versus industrialized. Eagly and Kite (1987) suggest that "the social roles that are available within a particular society shape the behaviour of the people, and this behaviour provides the basic observations from which images of nationalities are derived" (p. 452). Though individual members of a given group might express these roles in a variety of idiosyncratic ways, other groups will hold quite simplistic stereotypes, especially from a distance when there is no real interaction. Thus, stereotypes can be more or less accurate depending on how much information one group holds on the other. As Campbell points out, "the more remote and less well-known the outgroup, the more purely projective the content of the stereotype and the less accurate it will be." Eagly and Kite (1987) thus found that Americans were apt to believe that Iranians were particularly aggressive, proud, hostile, arrogant, and religious, though they had very little knowledge upon which to base these beliefs except for the regular newscasts of newsworthy events around the American Embassy hostage-taking incident (around 1979). "The inhabitants of these disliked countries were perceived as relatively unfriendly and unkind" (p. 461). The important thing to note here is that stereotypes are primarily about two groups of individuals. The first group, the perceivers, hold the stereotypes to be true and these stereotypes are more or less accurate, depending on the amount of information available to the perceivers. The other group, the perceived, occupy roles and are involved in role performances that more or less accurately reflect the stereotypes held by the other group.

In 1987, Alice Eagly and Mary Kite studied the stereotypes of nationalities as applied to both men and women. At the outset they observed that

social roles are important because they determine the behaviors of group members, and observation of these behaviors are the basic data from which people form their images of groups of people. . . . Because racial groups in American society are differentiated on the basis of social class, with blacks more socio-economically disadvantaged than whites, people often interact across racial lines and roles that differ in power and privilege. As a consequence the content of beliefs about racial groups reflects the

characteristic behaviors ascribed to differing social classes (p. 451).

Moreover, differences in racial stereotypes are rendered even more complex by the stereotypes one holds concerning men and women. "People in the domestic role are thought to behave considerably more communally and less agentically than people in the employee role" (p. 452).

In many cases the stereotypes are based on interaction at a distance rather than face-to-face interaction. Stereotypes at a distance do not change very much and are mostly influenced by newsworthy events, where what is reported is the public behavior of the leadership or high-profile people of a nation. These, of course, would mostly be men, having, by and large, higher status and influence in most nationalities. Thus the stereotypes of nationalities are more similar to the stereotypes of the men than of the women of these nationalities.

On the other hand, face-to-face interactions create situations where stereotypes are continuously under review with greater and more accurate information feeding the feedback system. Thus we can perceive certain immediate benefits of personal social integration that could have some beneficial impact on the stereotypes people have of handicapped individuals or handicapped groups.

Eagly also observed that the types of roles that are available for observation in a given nationality are a function of these countries' economies and social structures. Thus we can perceive differences between the roles available in industrial nations versus the roles that are available in countries whose economies are based on subsistence agriculture. Certainly these roles will have a dramatic impact on the national stereotypes as we perceive them.

Campbell (1967) suggested that stereotypes were apt to be particularly strong when there were obvious differences between the perceiver and perceived. If individuals live elsewhere, look different, express themselves in different languages, have different cultures, live in different economic conditions and thus hold different occupational roles, and so on. As Berger (1992) suggested, there are group differences that can be scientifically ascertained and are not beyond being noticed by the common man.

It has been amply demonstrated in the literature that people react quite systematically to different physical characteristics. Clare Burstall (1976) showed that teachers systematically attended more positively to the most

attractive students. Not surprisingly, with all this positive attention, these children did quite well in school. More recently, Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, and Longo (1991) did a meta-analytic review of research on the physical attractiveness stereotype and found much to confirm it. By and large, people are apt to ascribe more favorable personality traits and more successful life outcomes to attractive targets, thus suggesting that "beautiful is good" (p. 109). "We observe that better looking people receive more favorable reactions from others" (p. 111). Stereotypes are thus expressed as implicit theories that one might hold of a class of persons, such as beautiful means good. We should not be surprised if this then leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy effect for social skills and social adjustments. Very simply, more opportunities are provided the person because beautiful people are then sought out and given much social reinforcement. And the beautiful are apt to live up to this stereotype up to a point in that they were found to have more social competence than their unattractive counterparts. All of the above enhances the psychological well-being and achievement of persons seen to be attractive (Umberson & Hughes, 1987).

Thus, it is difficult for people to deny what they see and to deny the group they are part of. The social roles people occupy form an integral part of how they are perceived and how they view themselves. For groups of impaired persons, where the stigmata of impairment is obvious and who have been historically segregated and congregated, stereotypes are apt to be particularly strong and long-lasting, particularly when unimpaired people have a lack of firsthand knowledge about this group of individuals and are limited to "at a distance" information garnered from the media or other sources. Stereotypes are apt to be particularly powerful on both sides of the fence. Stereotypes can be more or less accurate depending on the information one has at hand. But as stereotypes are found to be inaccurate, more accurate ones will form. It is interesting that stereotypes formed at a distance do not resist long to firsthand knowledge that comes from one-to-one interaction. At the very least the stereotype for such an individual is apt to change (see Eagly & Kite, 1987).

## 7 THE ROLE AND THE PERSON

Though Wolfensberger (1983) seemed early on to

indicate that there were important differences between the concepts of person and roles, later writings (Wolfensberger, 1992; see chapter 5 of this book) suggest that these differences are either less important or immaterial to the issue of valorization. Both authors (Wolfensberger, 1983; 1992; see chapter 5 of this book) write of the valuing the person controversy, possibly in reference to Perrin & Nirje (1985) and Nirje (1992), who suggest that persons must be integrated in their “integrity” not just by the “manipulation” of behaviors and appearances. Recently, Martin Elks (1994) suggested that roles did not stand as the equivalent of the person and that SRV was in a sense more reductionistic than Normalization. Perrin and Nirje (1985) suggest that North American Normalization (circa 1972) deals with appearances and conformity whereas Thomas and Wolfensberger (chapter 5 this book) counter that since one never encounters role-less persons, the “person,” so to speak, so often idealized is nevertheless an abstraction. As Wolfensberger and Thomas (1994) point out, much of the current discussion on who or what is a “person” occurs in the realms of philosophy and ethics, and deals with establishing exclusionary criteria, a problematic issue from an SRV perspective. Moreover, Wolfensberger (1992) proposes that “roles are so powerful that they largely define who we are” (p. 20). Do role theorists make the claims of equivalency between the person and his roles? Is role theory as encompassing as SRV would seem to require?

There are two vantage points that should be considered in reviewing this question: the person as viewed by others, and the person as experienced by himself.

#### 7.1 THE PERSON, ROLES, AND PERCEIVER

Turner (1978) proposes that it is through roles that we get to know people. He goes on to suggest that an observer will, in some situations, “merge” the role and the person, in other words, observers will equate the person with the roles he plays, especially if there are really no other cues to knowing such a person. Perceptions of roles help us create the person; the setting he is in, the social positions he occupies, the behaviors that he exhibits, the persons he interacts with: his role set. In this sense, Turner suggests that the personality of the person is the sum of his roles, that the personality of a person is in the eye of the beholder. “Role person merger” occurs when our concept of a person is tied to one or some of the roles

this person plays. In such circumstances there is a complete identification between the person and role he or she plays. In a sense the person is a simplifying assumption. It can be understood as the sum of roles or the sum of identities. According to Turner, role person merger is behavioral rather than cognitive, in the sense that a person’s self-conception may be at variance with the role person merger. Finally, he suggests that some roles become so important in one’s life that the person plays this role even in settings that do not demand it, to the point that other people will view “a particular role as accurately revealing a person” (p. 6).

Some roles become very defining of the person, especially in situations where a person might have access to very few roles. Thus, that Wolfensberger’s (1969) historical deviancy roles are life defining is at the very least plausible. As shown above, the client role (Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1994) can have a perverse influence in the lives of devalued individuals. From the perceiver’s perspective, this role person merger is particularly important when dealing with groups of people with whom the perceiver has very little direct experience.

In this sense, roles stand alone and are known independently of the people to whom they are attributed to, as when we are told of a person we do not otherwise know, that he or she plays such and such a role, we are already knowledgeable of that person. This very simple knowledge creates expectations. We could thus speak of roles independently of the persons who occupy them in general terms that describe groups of individuals. It is not surprising that some roles are truly universal and in fact are observed in most cultures (Newcomb, Turner, & Converse, 1975; Biddle, 1979). Role language is a common way of describing that which is; of describing others (Turner, 1978) but also of describing and understanding ourselves (Thoits, 1983; Biddle, 1979).

Role person merger should not be understood simplistically as an artifact of perceptual bias where the observer’s understanding of a person is limited to his or her knowledge of the role(s) a person plays. Some roles are so important that they are definitive of the person from setting to setting and time to time (Biddle, 1979; Eagly, 1987; Turner, 1978). If such roles are truly defining, then their impact should not be limited to observers, but also be intimately experienced by the perceived. For Turner, who proposes that roles lead to behavioral predictability allowing others to know and recognize an individual (1990), such observed mergers relate the identification

of the individual with a role (1978), leading Turner to propose that roles are an integral and defining part of personality (1988).

## 7.2 PERSON, ROLES, AND IDENTITY

Researchers and theorists who study roles from the perspective of the perceived often refer to the concept as “role identity” or “identity” (Biddle, 1979; Deaux, 1993; Stryker, 1987; Thoits, 1983).

Role identities are self-conceptions in terms of one’s position in the social structure (e.g., “I am a father, husband, welder, union member, uncle . . .”). Specifically, role identities are viewed here as self-conceptions based on enduring, normative, reciprocal relationships with other people (Thoits, 1991, p. 103).

Kay Deaux (1993) suggests that there is so much overlap between the concepts of social identity (social role) and personal identity (role identity) that such distinctions are for all intents and purposes “arbitrary and misleading. . . Personal identity is defined, at least in part, by group memberships, and social categories are infused with personal meanings” (p. 5).

A number of theorists have suggested that there is an important concordance between the roles a person has and who that person is. Peggy Thoits (1992), a prolific role theorist and researcher, writes:

In essence, identities are answers to the question “who am I?” in terms of the positions or roles that one holds (“I am a mother, a teacher, an aunt, a tennis player . . .”). Because identities define “who I am” they should be sources of existential meaning and purpose in life (pp. 236-237).

When people respond to the open-ended question “who am I?”, they commonly include role descriptors as self-descriptors (Thoits, 1991). Role identities tell us who we are and give us guidance in terms of how to behave, thus providing us with “existential security” (Thoits, 1983). Thus, Thoits, in her theoretical work, proposes that identity and self-conception are based on role positions, which come together in a hierarchical structure of salience.

Park and Burgess, in their *Introduction to Sociology*, defined the term “person” as “an individual’s conception of role” (quoted in Znaniecky, 1965). Ralph Turner (1978) suggests that some roles become so deeply merged with

the person that they, in fact, become the person at the very least for observers but also having a pervasive effect upon the subject’s personality. This proposition has certainly been amply demonstrated by Alice Eagly’s (1987) research into gender roles, which she states have a dramatic impact on stereotypes, attitudes, and hence on the learning opportunities afforded to the role incumbent. Some roles become very defining of the person, especially in situations where a person might have access to very few roles.

Goffman’s (1961) field studies on total institution inmates describe in very great detail how certain settings and social situations could be severely limiting in that many role opportunities were systematically excluded from an inmate’s life experience. Alice Eagly, in her research, suggests a different version of the same argument when she states that incumbency in a gender role will spill over in other situations and settings, such as the workplace (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). It is interesting that Eagly and her colleagues also found that as secondary roles took on more importance, the spillover effect of gender roles could be much diminished.

The concept of social roles can account for much knowledge concerning the person we observe and a person’s self-concept (Morgan & Schwalbe, 1990). Role theory accounts for the person in comprehensive terms. It speaks of the person as object of perception, and just as importantly it accounts for the person as self-experienced in terms that have been useful in generating research and theory. A number of researchers, including Thoits, Menaghan, and Stryker, have attempted to link self-concept as understood by role-identity to well-being and other important “feeling” states that are at the heart of some of criticisms that have in the past been aimed at SRV and North American Normalization (see section 8 below).

The social role concept seems to offer SRV a more comprehensive and encompassing view of the person than the various Normalization formulations. Wolfensberger’s (1972) earliest formulation proposed actions for the “behaviors, appearances and interpretations” of the person and was criticized for dealing only with the “appearances” of the handicapped person and not recognizing the person’s “integrity” (Perrin & Nirje, 1985). Moreover, the social role concept has a rich track record of research and theorizing that lends itself well to the action implications of both Normalization and SRV.

### 7.3 ROLE AVIDITY

As we have seen, roles take up a lot of conceptual space when thinking of the person. On the one hand, others perceive a person in roles and oftentimes think of that person in terms of the role or roles the person occupies. On the other hand, a person's identity is intimately tied to his roles. Thoits (1983) points out that Zimbardo's prison experiment, alluded to above, also demonstrates that in the absence of valued roles, persons will willingly, and with high commitment and enthusiasm, take on devalued role identities because these also provide a person with existential security. Roles tell us and others who we are. This provides an important explanation as to why persons readily take up the deviancy roles that Wolfensberger (1969) describes. It helps explain why individuals become locked into roles even when they are unappealing or negative, such as the class bully.

Thus, we may describe this willingness and even need of roles as "role avidity." This construct operates in two ways. Roger Barker and his colleagues (Barker, 1968; Barker & Gump, 1964; Barker & Wright, 1954) have described how settings and setting programs compel individuals to take positions of responsibility. Wicker (1979) has called these pressures "habitat claims." Thoits (1983, 1991) has argued that individuals are unable to remain roleless. Roles are essential to identity, and individuals will engage in an avid accumulation of roles even when they are already overburdened. Thus role avidity proposes that in a social setting, an individual will take up an available role even if it is devaluing, unless the person has other settings or situations to go to where better roles are available.

### 8 ARE THE GOOD THINGS IN LIFE CONTINGENT UPON VALUED ROLES?

It is the creation and attribution of valued roles for persons that will assure social integration and access to the good things in life (Wolfensberger, 1983). Wolfensberger and Thomas (1994), in their recent overview of Social Role Valorization, assert that one of the premises underlying SRV "is that people who feel socially valued roles are more apt to get the good things of life than those in devalued roles." Wolfensberger, Thomas and Caruso (1996) list 17 good things of life, which include home, family, friendship, work, respect, and good health.

Though few studies that were surveyed measured these specific examples of the good things in life, there are nonetheless a number of studies that show that certain key roles were associated with physical health, psychological well-being, achievement, and the effective survival of life transitions, and provided a general sense of social support and community embeddedness, and, finally, ensured a certain degree of protection in times of distress.

Peggy Thoits is particularly well known as a researcher who has shown the links between psychological well-being, differences in psychological distress, and role identities. Because identities define "who I am," they should be sources of existential meaning and purpose in life (Thoits, 1992)—what Thoits elsewhere calls "existential security" (Thoits, 1983). In her review of the literature, Thoits (1991) concludes "corroboratively, a number of studies, some longitudinal, show that the accumulation of role identities is generally beneficial for psychological well-being" (p. 105). In reference to the vast social support literature that now exists, Thoits concludes that the multiplication of role identities is at the same time the multiplication of social connections. Cohen and Wills (1985), in their review of the social support literature, showed that in general the greater the social network of individuals, the greater was their psychological well-being. All of this should be reminiscent of some of the arguments put forward by Wolfensberger in support of personal social integration of handicapped individuals (Wolfensberger, 1992). It would thus seem that social integration and social support can be defined and operationalized in terms of role theory.

It is not surprising that research also shows that some roles are more important than others in assuring psychological well-being (Menaghan, 1989) and are more protective in times of psychological distress (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Moreover, recent research by Blair Wheaton (1990) suggests that prior role history has a major impact on the stressfulness of more recent life transitions, such as marital breakup, job loss, retirement, widowhood, and so forth.

In support of the position that some roles are more important than others, Lois Verbrugge (1983), in her research review, found that being employed, being married, and parenthood were all significantly related to good physical health. Verbrugge's own research tends to show that the possible effects of these roles are additive. Thoits's review of the literature shows a clear relationship

between some roles and mortality, even when controlling for certain illnesses.

As Cohen and Wills (1985) have shown in their review of the literature, mortality from all causes was greater among persons with relatively low levels of social support. Cohen and Wills go on to show that it is a high level of social integration that ensures health and well-being, whereas certain key relationships improve a person's capacity to cope with stressful events. Since it is roles that provide the opportunities for social relationships (indeed the role construct subsumes relationship), the number of roles has a direct bearing upon the size of an individual's social network. It is, however, certain key roles that buffer against highly stressful events. Thus, the role identities of friend, spouse, family member, and even possibly coworker, provide one with the opportunity of calling upon others for assistance in times of difficulty. The existence of these very important role identities is contingent upon the opportunity to engage in these role behaviors and, of course, the expectation that one can contribute and benefit from them.

## 9 ROLES AND EXPECTANCIES

The expectancies construct, often expressed as the self-fulfilling prophecy, can stand on its own (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) but it is particularly useful as a component part of role theory. It is fundamental to Wolfensberger's conceptualization of social roles (1983, 1992) and has been part of the teachings on Normalization since the beginning, in 1969 (see Sarason, 1969; Wolfensberger, 1969, 1972). It is also a key component of Alice Eagly's research on gender roles.

From the beginning, expectancy research has been fraught with controversy surrounding its purported potency (Brophy, 1983; Jussim, 1990) and concerning research methodology (Thorndike, 1968). The Wolfensberger presentation on role expectancy (one of the seven themes of the introductory SRV workshop) is problematic because, taking its cue from the early self-fulfilling prophecy research of Rosenthal and his colleagues, it overemphasizes the potency of expectancy at the expense of other complementary social dynamics, leaving one with the impression of a simple circular mechanism that "causes" role conformity. For instance, research does not always distinguish between more or less accurate perceptual biases, which, of course, could have a determining impact on the self-fulfilling effect.

"Although erroneous expectations may create self-fulfilling prophecies, the extent to which they have thus far been found to do so is usually limited" (Jussim, 1990, p. 13). The SRV treatment of expectancies is also problematic because it does not distinguish between expectations occurring in "naturalistic" situations from those that are contrived for intervention and research purposes and which are thought to be more powerful than the former.

Jussim's (1990) meta-analytic review of expectancy research in "naturalistic" situations shows that overall the expectancy construct accounts for 20% of variance. This is less than the early claims of Rosenthal and others but is nonetheless nothing to sneeze at. Moreover, contrived expectations set up for research or intervention purposes can sometimes explain over 70% of the variance in the performance change of persons. This certainly supports the strategy of consciously engineering milieu, activities, and interactions that communicate high expectations and elicit behavior that conforms with these expectations. Moreover, expectations are particularly powerful when they are realistic and thus based on accurate perceptual biases.

Crosby and Clayton (1990), Jones (1990), and Ditto and Hilton (1990), as well as Eagly (1987), suggest that expectancies are a powerful tool of intervention that has so far not been sufficiently exploited from a programmatic or even social policy perspective.

In conclusion, the current SRV teachings on expectancies need to be updated: Naturalistic expectancies are not as powerful as SRV would seem to suggest in the creation and maintenance of devalued roles and identities. But contrived expectancies used to combat devaluation can be very effective indeed.

## 10 THE USEFULNESS OF SOCIAL ROLES AS A COMPONENT OF OTHER APPROACHES AND THEORIES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION

If SRV's use of social roles were completely original, then its validity and usefulness would be in question. The fact that other researchers, theoreticians, and practitioners have found the concept useful is not irrelevant to the present debate.

Certainly in the general population there is a recognition that something has been achieved when a person of an otherwise devalued group attains a role of importance. Much was made of the fact that the 1995 Miss America, Heather Whitestone, is hearing-impaired. More recently there was much controversy but also accolades for the black woman who became Miss Italy. There was also much controversy over a proposed statue of the late president Franklin D. Roosevelt, and whether his physical impairment (he was wheelchair-bound) should be made obvious. Press coverage of the 1996 presidential race in the USA often referred to the poor and humble beginnings of both candidates. For North America, at least, there is a sense in the popular culture that every role is open to anyone from any social group. The ideal of upward mobility is rooted in the notion of roles, and so-called affirmative action programs operationalize this as a tool of intervention.

Biddle, in 1979, suggested that role theory offers education, psychiatry, clinical and counseling psychology, social work, community development, and leadership training “a vocabulary and the promise of empirical power”(p. 12). It is not surprising that SRV and Normalization are not the only service strategies to adopt the role schema. The impairment, disability, and handicap model defines “handicapped”: that which limits or prevents fulfillment of a role that is normal for that individual (cited in Saint Claire, 1989, p. 16). This might be of particular relevance since Nirje (1993) has recently changed his terminology for mental retardation to bring it closer to the World Health Organization (WHO) definition. Researchers in the field of mental retardation, such as Saint Claire (1989), have found the role component of the WHO definition a useful tool for conceptualizing new ways of assisting mentally retarded persons. Therapeutic approaches, such as those of George Kelly (1955/1963) and Jacob Moreno (Moreno, 1990), have been mentioned above. Structured learning methods in mental health, such as those proposed by Goldstein (Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw, & Klein, 1980), use role play and scripting as key components.

More recently, the noted researcher Kenneth Heller (1993) pointed to the maintenance of “useful social roles” as one of the best methods of prevention for elderly persons. Heller, in his review of the relevant literature, shows that many informal roles convey positive valuation on the incumbents and are dependent not only on competence, but also on social support. According to

Heller, thinking of prevention or intervention in terms of social roles opens up “new possibilities,” at least for elderly persons.

A number of feminist researchers and theorists have used role theory for the purpose of analyzing gender differences and discrimination. Alice Eagly (1995) splendidly reviews the breadth of this work and the controversies that surround it. Though Eagly and other feminist researchers confine themselves to the study of the situation of women, the possible transfer and application of their research findings and theoretical refinements to other fields is, to say the least, exciting.

Eagly and Mladinic (1989) found evidence that attitudes and stereotypes about women are in the process of changing positively. They suggest that more and more people are becoming conscious of the low valuation of women and are monitoring their overt responses to avoid appearing prejudiced toward women. “Such a tendency could create a ‘bend over backwards’ effect in subjects’ responses, resulting in attitudes and stereotypes about women that are biased in a positive direction” (p. 554). The relatively low attitude-belief correlations found for the subjects might suggest a process of societal change in the making, where, with time, members of society integrate new attitudes about women. However, Eagly and Mladinic note that positive attitudes do not necessarily translate into power and social position. But it does seem to be the necessary starting point.

Crosby and Clayton’s (1990) review of affirmative action programs points to the need to design such interventions with a careful regard to expectancy effects. It is clear that such programs use the concept of roles (in the case of affirmative action, it is vocational roles) and related constructs, such as expectancies, as useful interventions to enact social policy. Jussim (1990) and Oseyrman and Markus (1990) all document the value and usefulness of role expectancy related research in creating and testing new strategies for social change.

Thus, social role theory as it is conceived of in SRV is not only a powerful theoretical tool for analyzing social devaluation, but it is also a powerful tool for developing strong and adaptive intervention strategies for and with devalued individuals and groups.

## 11 CONCLUSION

The concept of social role has been associated with Normalization from the very beginning. SRV's espousal of a role-oriented formulation can be seen as the result of Normalization's not-so-surprising evolution over the past 25 years. The social role concept comes complete with a rich and well-articulated history of theoretical and research enterprise. This work, as well as the role concept's grounding in the day-to-day experiences of the nonacademic, should greatly enrich SRV's own theory-building project as well as provide new impetus and new direction to its ambitions as a theory of psychosocial intervention.

The latest SRV formulation, which integrates the role concept, is a clear improvement over previous formulations that, in the case of North American Normalization, were more focused on exterior (behavioral,

appearance, and setting) changes of the person or, in the case of Scandinavian Normalization, were accompanied by imprecise or undefined terminology that left a great deal to interpretation. The role concept gets as close to the person as language and conceptual structures allow. It accounts for the inner life as well as providing a comprehensive understanding of the person as object of perception. It accounts for the person realistically and comprehensively within narrow and broad social contexts. Much work remains to be done to fully integrate into SRV all the richness that is role theory.

On the other hand, SRV provides role theory with practical and comprehensive usefulness (Lemay, 1996b; 1996c). It adds to role theory a broad intervention dimension that can be tied to ideals of social justice and that can be seen as a radical challenge to a society that discriminates on the basis of ability and social position. It would seem that this grafting of role theory to Social Role Valorization could bear much fruit.

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