

# Social Role Valorization Insights Into the Social Integration Conundrum

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## Abstract

More and more persons with mental retardation and psychiatric disabilities are present in mainstream society, yet have little interaction and few relationships outside their own peer groups of devalued persons. Social integration remains a desirable yet elusive goal for most human service organizations, and there continues to be a certain amount of confusion about what constitutes social integration. Recent reviews in North America and Europe testify to the difficulty of achieving social integration, particularly for people with mental retardation and psychiatric disabilities. Social role valorization, with its use of the social role concept, provides useful insights and tools for analyzing the social integration conundrum. A social role conceptualization of social integration is proposed and an illustrative example is provided.

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## Social Integration: A Confusion of Definitions

Integration has long been at the heart of normalization (Nirje, 1969, 1980; Wolfensberger, 1972), and social role valorization (Lemay, 1995, 1996; Wolfensberger, 1998). *Social integration*, or the valued presence and participation of individuals with disabilities within mainstream society, remains a desirable, yet elusive goal of social policy and human service programming.

Flynn and Aubry (1999) published a comprehensive review of social integration in mental retardation and mental health services. They pointed out that different researchers and writers have developed a variety of definitions and operationalizations of *social integration*. Terms such as *inclusion* and *mainstreaming* and expressions such as *social participation*—that all approximate social integration—are at the forefront of much research and debate. Not surprisingly, reviewers of the research on integration have found a multiplicity of definitions and some terminological confusion.

For instance, Bouchard and Dumont (1996), in a large scale study in Quebec, ended up equating social integration with mere physical presence and made no distinctions concerning the interactions

among individuals with mental handicaps and those between persons with mental handicaps and persons without handicaps. The United Nations' Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons With Disabilities promote "equal opportunities for participation" but define it mostly in terms of receiving services and presence in settings, rather than in terms of relationships between persons (Lemay, 1994c).

Moreover, there is some debate about the desirability of social integration. Some groups view social integration as *assimilation*, where a particular group gives up much that is distinctive about its own subculture in order to participate in mainstream culture. Thus, some groups of individuals who are deaf, who have developed alternative language and a subculture, contest the need and even the desirability of participation in the broader culture. The same applies to some groups of individuals who have physical disabilities and seem to promote the notion of parallel communities (Lemay, 1994b).

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## Social Integration: The Current State of Affairs

Flynn and Lemay (1999) have published a relatively comprehensive review of the impact of nor-

malization and social role valorization since the introduction of these ideas in 1969. Both Nirje (1969, 1980) and Wolfensberger (1972, 1998), the originators of these ideas, have been at the forefront of defining and promoting *social integration*. However, a variety of contributors to the Flynn and Lemay (1999) book came to the conclusion that social integration (real integration) is not occurring, despite an important increase in the physical presence of members of devalued groups (particularly persons with mental retardation) within mainstream society.

Burchard (1999), who has conducted a 20-year program of research on the impact of normalization policy and programming on individuals with mental retardation residing in Vermont, concluded that:

These results tell us that social integration, as envisioned by advocates and providers, is not a reality for adults with mental retardation, not even for those in supervised apartments or for those who have lived with their families in their home communities all of their lives. (p. 265)

Kristiansen, Söder, and Tøssebro (1999), after reviewing the Scandinavian experience, came to similar conclusions:

The degree of social integration was also shown to vary, although at the lower end of a scale; generally, different studies showed that social relations between the "integrated" person with disabled and nondisabled peers/neighbors were not very frequent or well developed. In some studies of housing integration, social isolation was pointed out as a major problem. (p. 413)

In their comprehensive review of integration, Flynn and Aubry (1999) extended these conclusions to persons with psychiatric disabilities:

On the one hand, persons with psychiatric disabilities are present in the community to the extent of accessing and using resources on their own. On the other hand, only a small proportion appear to have regular interactions with family, friends, or other community residents. (p. 295)

In her Program Analysis of Service Systems' Implementation of Normalization Goals (PASSING) assessment of the residential situations of 73 former psychiatric patients, O'Connor (2001) found, among other things, "abhorrent living conditions among many of the participants . . . [and a] staggering level of poverty" (p. 136) as well as few contacts outside of their peer groups.

Sandys (1999) provided an in-depth case study of the challenges of implementing social integration as it is operationalized in the context of supported employment services to individuals who are devalued.

Supported employment programs utilize a place-then-train

framework: The individual is placed in a work situation consistent with their interests and talents, and training and support are provided at the work site in order to ensure the success of the work situation. (p. 305)

Supported employment requires the interplay of established members of a work setting, the work setting itself, the persons (e.g., mentors, coaches) who attempt to mediate supported employment and, last but not least, the individual who is devalued and who is being introduced to the setting. Sandys' qualitative study documented the perception, receptivity, and actions of the valued established members of a work setting who are called upon to interact with new (devalued) members in a given grouping and setting. She further described the strategy used by supported employment programs to garner the participation of employers:

It drew in the employer as part of the helping team that would together assist the person with the disability. It provided an opportunity for the employers to see themselves in the new role of helper or counselor. All this drew the employer into a situation where new rules applied, where success is measured not in productivity or dollars, but in terms of personal development, growth, and self-esteem. At the same time, the message of the supported employment program is that this is a person who is 'different,' who may act in unusual ways, who needs to be handled differently and with particular skill. (p. 312) [Not surprisingly, employers] define what they are doing primarily in terms of "helping" someone, and come to measure their own success by the extent to which the person appears to benefit from the situation. (p. 311)

Sandys (1999) also noted that the outcomes of such a strategy do not seem to be conducive to a totally successful or positive social participation:

On the positive side, it seems to buy a higher level of tolerance for the person with the disability, increasing the range of challenges with which an employer is prepared to contend . . . At its worst, a mind-set in which the employer defines her/his role as providing a service that will contribute to the personal development of an individual may serve to obscure the fact that the person is performing work for which he or she should be appropriately remunerated . . . Another (potentially) negative outcome . . . is to reinforce the perception of the person with an intellectual handicap as dependent, childlike, and in need of care. (p. 311)

Olshansky (1972) had warned that employers would not find much use in employing "clients." Sandys (1999) concluded that, not surprisingly, "supported employment often means part-time employment, low wages, and continued social isolation" (p. 313). All of the above quotes effectively illustrate the role-muddle that employers, employees, and supported employees find themselves in when placed in such programmed circumstances.

An important note about the above review of recent research is that it is mostly concerned with the social integration that is mediated by professional services; there are certainly situations where individuals with disabilities are well socially integrated through the efforts of family and friends. Many professionals in mediated social integration programs, confused by numerous definitions and hampered by problematic strategies, such as those of the supported employment described above, fail to make a dent in the isolation experienced by individuals who are devalued. Social role valorization's reliance on the concept of social roles provides a tool of analysis that might provide some clues concerning the challenge of social integration and might inspire more effective intervention.

### Social Role Valorization, Personal Social Integration, and Valued Social Participation

In this article, I describe social integration related to increasing the likelihood of positive interaction and valued relationships between an individual who is socially devalued (who is a member of a given devalued group) and members of a valued group within mainstream culture. Such a view of social integration is particularly inspired by Wolfensberger (1998) in his book on social role valorization with his definition of *personal social integration and valued social participation* . . . [which] would require (a) valued participation, (b) with valued people (c) in valued activities that (d) take place in valued settings" (p. 123). This definition, according to Flynn and Aubry (1999), is viewed as one of the more useful definitions of the term: "Even though research and common experience suggest that 'real' integration, so defined, is relatively rare, the concept affords a high and worthy target at which service supports, practices, and policies may productively aim" (p. 296). I refer to Wolfensberger's personal social integration and valued social participation as "real" integration.

Within such a perspective, social roles mediate the relative value of the social space occupied by an individual, as is highlighted in the most recent definition of social role valorization (Social Role Valorization Council, 2004):

Social Role Valorization is a theoretical framework that, based on empirical knowledge, and drawing on multiple theories in sociology and psychology, (a) posits a relationship between the social roles people occupy, and how these people are then per-

ceived, evaluated, and treated; and (b) affords the formulation of predictions of how shaping the social roles of individuals, groups, or classes will influence how perceivers of these roles respond to, and treat, these respective parties, and of a great many strategies for doing so. (p. 83)

In a nut shell, social role valorization means that occupying valued social roles increases the likelihood that the "good things of life" will be afforded to the person (Wolfensberger, Thomas, & Caruso, 1996). This is not completely original. For instance, Wiersma (1996) also equated "functioning in social roles" (p. 103) with integration and argued that it is at the heart of mental health. In his review of the relevant literature, Heller (1993) pointed out that many informal roles help maintain competence and social support and should serve as the focal point of prevention and intervention strategies for persons who are elderly.

However, Wolfensberger's conceptualization of social integration, developed as it is within the broader framework of social role valorization, suggests that it is not any social role that will lead to "real" integration. Social role valorization places much emphasis on an added ingredient (i.e., the notion of "valued"), which limits social integration to *positive* and *valued* social roles.

The most extensive discussion of social integration from a social role valorization perspective is to be found in *PASSING* (Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983), a program evaluation tool based on social role valorization. This program operationalizes social integration in ratings that propose an image and competency enhancement basis for social integration strategies. In the imagery considerations, Wolfensberger and Thomas proposed that interacting with valued people in valued activities and in valued settings will "rub-off" on the otherwise devalued person, to the point where the stigma of negative differences might disappear or be overlooked, at least in the place and for the duration of such interaction. The power and complexity of *image transfer* is best understood by referring to the section in their book on social image enhancement (pp. 31–38), where they argued that the valuing or devaluing "meanings, sentiments, values, etc., attached to one place, object, person, idea, or symbol can become attached to another entity which is juxtaposed to it" (p. 33). Imagery concerning social status, similarity to others (membership in a group), competence, other personal attributes and characteristics, and indeed social roles may convey value information about and to an individual through

juxtaposition and then through the concomitant expectations.

The competency enhancement implications of social integration are also described at length (Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983, pp. 429–437). Valued activities with valued persons in valued settings provide new and rich opportunities for developing and eventually mastering new valued skills and roles. This is consonant with the vast literature on self-efficacy, in which Bandura (1994), for instance, suggested that much learning can occur by what he termed *vicarious experiences*, by observing models that have a perceived similarity to the person and will enable them to achieve success in certain situations: “Through their behavior and expressed ways of thinking, competent models transmit knowledge and teach observers effective skills and strategies for managing environmental demands. Acquisition of better means raises perceived self-efficacy” (p. 73). Moreover, the settings, and the interactions that occur therein, make competency demands (Wicker, 1973) that increase the likelihood of learning. Wolfensberger and Thomas suggested a continuum of interactions and relationships, where “if a person experiences only relationships that are transient, trivial, superficial, perfunctory or fleeting in nature, then s/he is likely to lead a socially isolated and lonely life, even if s/he has many such relationships” (p. 430). Short-term, or transient relationships, are not viewed as the desired outcome, but, rather, long-term relationships (something similar to primary roles, which will be described later) with valued individuals are sought that will then sum up into ongoing social support. Thus, an individual’s successful social integration provides opportunities for learning positive social behaviors, or prosocialness, and the building up of a social support network of valued acquaintances and friends. Social networks are another important factor that support and enhance resilience in individuals who experience adversity (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). As Bandura (2001) pointed out, social networks do not happen by chance. More often than not they are carefully constructed over the years by individuals who demonstrate a certain level of prosocialness. Prosocial behaviors can be learned and, of course, intervention and support can accompany individuals, especially in their first stages of prosocial development. In their section on “depth, individualization, and continuity of integrative interaction,” Wolfensberger and Thomas (1983, p. 430), social

role valorization provides extensive guidelines for creating and supporting the social contexts that are at the heart of social integration and the creation of long-term social networks of family, valued acquaintances, and friends.

The social role valorization version of social integration can be viewed as a special case of integration, where the characteristics and qualities of the role setting, and of the people who are being interacted with, are key criteria for determining whether it is occurring. The social isolation described at the beginning of this article is best understood as an absence of valued social roles. From this perspective, personal social integration and valued social participation is an end-state, a goal as well as a means to a variety of ends (i.e., image and competency enhancement, the creation of social networks, etc.). Thus, the above PASSING ratings, and indeed the concept of personal social integration, can be helpful in understanding human service mediated valued roles and relationships, and the life/service goals we harbor for individuals who are currently denied such valued roles.

Wolfensberger and Thomas (1983) did not deny the reality and even desirability of other, less image-enhancing relationships, roles, or personal integrations. Most individuals who are devalued have spent much of their lives in segregated subcultures where they have nurtured long-standing, possibly beneficial and valuable relationships. They noted that

If service workers were to try to put an end to such a relationship, especially if it is a long-term one, then the relationship discontinuity and personal suffering that could result would probably far outweigh any image benefits of breaking off the relationship. (p. 209)

This is suggestive of Thoits (1995) hypothesis where, given the importance of roles in establishing personal identity, the loss of a salient relationship role will be experienced as an important life stressor. For individuals who have few roles and are thus in a state of *role avidity* (Lemay, 1999)—where 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” (p. 233)—the loss of a relationship role might be particularly devastating.

### Social Role Valorization, Social Role Theory, and Integration

From a social role valorization perspective, social roles are a way of looking at the everyday life

of devalued individuals and groups that allows for insightful analysis and then intervention (Lemay, 1994a, 1999). However, social role theory and social role researchers and theorists are mostly interested about how roles occur in the broader society (Biddle, 1979; Stryker & Statham, 1985). Some researchers do indeed invoke role theory in their study of special cases of roles and social integration as they apply to ethnic minorities (Jackson, Thoits, & Taylor, 1995) or in gender research (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Dielman, 1997).

Social role valorization's version of social integration, that implies social roles, is essentially about the connections between individuals in settings and in groups. People take up these connections through reciprocal and complementary roles. One might even suggest that there is no connection (relationship) unless there is a role that mediates it (Turner, 1978). Thus, (valued) social participation requires a (valued) role in a given (valued) context; personal social integration is said to be occurring when an individual is engaged in (valued) reciprocated role activities with other (valued) role incumbents in a given (valued) social setting. Such a sentence describes the context of activity for the vast majority of the human race, with the "valued" qualifier adding the special case proposed by social role valorization's social integration. Thus, personal social integration—serving as a process for acquiring social roles—is a normative state of affairs. In general terms, the opposite of personal social integration is *personal social isolation*, or the absence of roles. (One could argue that the roles of "outcast" or "hermit" or other such roles belie the above statement; however, even such roles are defined in terms of others who, in such cases, are absent. In any event, to remove all possible confusion, here I limit my references to social roles that clearly require the interaction of others.) There are social roles that do not require much in terms of interaction or participation (sports fan, observer, book or magazine reader), but such cases highlight that roles can be placed on an "intensity of interaction" continuum. The Bouchard and Dumont (1996) study, mentioned above, viewed integration as simply the opposite of isolation. Some disability advocates also refer to integration in the same way and, not surprisingly to some of them, the occupation of social roles in a minority (and possibly societally devalued) group is a sufficient, and sometimes the only desirable outcome for an individual with a disability.

Social isolation is not the only problem that one addresses with integration but rather that of segregation and congregation—with members of one's handicapped group—where individuals are subtly, or not so subtly, precluded from taking up valued contributory roles within valued groups. Normalization and especially social role valorization provide a rich conceptual framework from which one can analyze and understand the segregation that so often accompanies devaluation and develop action strategies to counter it.

Scandinavian and North American versions of normalization and social role valorization all hold that the living conditions and experiences of typical community members should be the measure of success in achieving normalization or for social role valorization, valued roles, and the good things of life. Bank-Mikkelsen (1980), and Nirje in his original 1969 formulation, made reference to the "normal," suggesting that typical life experiences and conditions are the norm against which we must compare the conditions and experiences of handicapped or otherwise devalued persons. Bank-Mikkelsen went so far as to suggest that this means "that mentally retarded people should not be treated in any special way" (1980, p. 56).

For most people in mainstream society, social integration occurs naturally and almost reflexively. Though one might not see a social integration problem for people in the larger valued culture, upon a closer examination, one might find that valued individuals are more or less integrated in a whole variety of different ways. There are, of course, hermits and individuals who isolate themselves from society. However, the great majority of individuals, particularly those who are valued, usually lead rich socially engaged lives with numerous primary and secondary roles that bring them into reciprocal relationships with a whole variety of other role partners. All of this sums up into strong and diverse social networks which, as researchers have found, are key elements of good physical and mental health (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Indeed, social networks and social support are key components of a number of integration conceptualizations (Flynn & Aubry, 1999).

The foregoing supports the notion mentioned above that the social integration of individuals and groups who have disabilities or are devalued must first and foremost be seen as a special case of social integration. It is a special case of social integration on two dimensions. First, qualitatively, socially de-

valued persons are usually segregated and are often limited to roles that engage them with other socially devalued persons. From a social role valorization perspective, social integration is concerned with the valued participation of a devalued individual with valued role partners. Second, quantitatively, devalued individuals on the whole occupy fewer roles and have fewer (total and different) role partners than do typical persons in the broader culture (Burchard, 1999). What seems to occur naturally and reflexively for valued people does not seem to occur in the same way, or in the same quantity, for members of marginalized groups, even when these persons are present and living in settings surrounded by members of the majority culture. Of course, as a starting point, nothing in what follows precludes the use of compensatory formal and informal social supports (such as mentors, coaches) and other forms of assistance that might counteract the effects of handicapping conditions. In any event, these types of support are often available to individuals with handicaps, such as in the supported employment study mentioned above, and yet do not lead to successful social integration. To understand why, for instance, physical integration does not necessarily lead to social integration, we must first understand how social integration occurs typically. An examination of how roles and social integration interlink developmentally and how roles tend to multiply and lead to extensive social networks for most individuals is important.

### From Primary to Secondary Roles: A Developmental Perspective

There are several aspects, defined as follows, of two broad categories of roles and two other relevant concepts. *Primary roles* are broad in that they are not setting-specific, and they are the context for strong long-lasting reciprocal relationships. We are born into a very few and very broad primary roles: son or daughter, dependent infant, brother or sister, grandson or granddaughter, etc. There are, of course, a few or even many small secondary/instrumental roles that are tied to the situation of birth and of early child care (e.g., babysitters, neighborly help). However, at birth and during early childhood, it is these few family-based primary roles that take up most of the time and relationship space of children. There is, of course, much that is instrumental about these few family-based roles, but they are primarily expressive and indeed irrational in na-

ture (Bronfenbrenner & Weiss, 1983). *Secondary roles* are usually narrow in that they are setting-specific, but they can be of short or long duration. They are mostly instrumental in nature (related to specific tasks and settings) but are accompanied by varying degrees of mostly formal expressive interaction. *Settings (or behavior settings)* are physical places or groups that make role demands upon individuals and where, over time, role regularities are established. *Valued or devalued roles* connote the relative desirability of a role for typical members of the valued culture. This should not be confused with the personal experience of roles, which may be positive or negative and based on factors such as role avidity or the fit of a role to a person's affinities.

Over time, the early broad primary roles develop, and the child gains mastery and competence through the attribution of a multiplicity of small secondary roles within the family or in close proximity to the family home. Thus, the child is given a number of chores to do and activities to engage in. These new small, but important roles are usually conducted under the supervision and assistance of one of the key primary role partners (parent or older sibling). As time goes on, new, broader, but still secondary roles are opened up through the mediation of some of these primary role partners. Thus, a child is enrolled in day care or an early school program and then involved in neighborhood sports or other activities, more often than not with the assistance and under the supervision of a family member. As the child has new role settings opened up to him or her, there appears the possibility of new secondary role relationship opportunities to conduct with other adults and peers. These secondary role settings, however, are very dynamic. Thus, a secondary role (e.g., playmate or student) may grow and develop into a primary role, such as acquaintance and then friend.

Thus, it would seem that the natural development of roles and the broadening of one's social circle (and role repertoire)—and, thus, increasing integration into neighborhood and then community life—goes from a few broad primary roles that mediate a multiplicity of new secondary roles in dynamic behavior settings where an individual finds the opportunity to develop new primary roles.

Indeed, this dependence upon primary role relationships to open up secondary roles continues well into adulthood. For instance, in a large survey in Canada, Clark (1999) reported that, by far, the greatest number of university graduates got their

first employment through the intercession of a family member or a family friend.

### Key Elements of Role Theory and Their Application to Social Integration

Proponents of social role theory attempt to describe and make predictable complex day-to-day (taken for granted) behaviors and interactions that occur between individuals or within groups. Through their analyses, role researchers have shown that, by and large, role behavior and setting activities are complex and show a great deal of variability, but remain very predictable and recognizable (Lemay, 1999). Most important, this dynamic complexity remains largely unexamined by role incumbents, who do not tend to think about the roles they play but rather consider themselves in, for example, an activity or a relationship. Most people shy away from such self-examination and self-consciousness, possibly because we do not have the time and because such examination might become paralyzing.

However, simplistic views about roles and social integration have the potential of leading to ineffective and even harmful action. For instance, some of the discussion, debate, and polemic around certain versions of integration seem to verge on romanticism: There is a clear preference for expressive primary role behaviors, such as friendship, neighborliness, and other such roles that suggest or lead to certain levels of deep relationship. Such roles, however, even in the lives of typical people, are relatively few in number and far between in new occurrences. By and large, our lives are an amalgam of secondary instrumental roles that require certain levels of competence and, most certainly, supported opportunity. Primary roles, the ultimate sources of identity and social belonging, are an achievable end result but not without much time and effort, and usually not without engaging in a certain number, and even attaining a critical mass, of secondary roles.

From such observations one could conclude that in order to achieve social integration, intervention must be limited to establishing and multiplying secondary roles, which in turn increase the likelihood of primary roles. Moreover, such limited secondary roles open up the possibility of more involved and complex secondary roles. Less can then develop into more.

One may not productively engage in the or-

ganizing of social integration without taking into consideration, and even possibly replicating, how it is carried out normatively and almost automatically in the broader culture. Indeed, doing it in a different way might, unfortunately, lead to resistance or what we might call *setting impermeability*: Members of the setting approached in a culturally alien way to take on a new role incumbent will most likely not know what to do or will actively resist engagement (Turner, 1989).

Turner (1989) proposed a number of principles and hypotheses to explain the relative social order one finds in settings and that might help guide social integration endeavors. Settings, such as family or other groupings, require a complementarity of roles to ensure that all that needs to be done gets done. For instance, groups and families require two leaders, one for instrumental leadership and the other for expressive leadership. Moreover, Turner suggested that a person's incumbency in a role will only be recognized if the role is reciprocated by others in complementary roles. For instance, leaders need followers; otherwise, leadership becomes bullying. Helpers need helpees; otherwise, helping can become leading, manipulating, or disruptive. To be a trainer, you need a trainee; to be an employee, you need an employer. Thus, to be a neighbor, you need a neighbor; to be a friend, you need a friend; and to be a hermit, you need other people to stay away and watch you from afar. In the supported employment example from above, supported employees were reciprocated to as clients but not as employees, and, thus, employers turned into benefactors and helpers. An important implication flows from the above postulates. Roles come in (at least) twos: Role incumbency is only recognized when there are others in the setting who are reciprocating the role. This is of great importance for social integration. The roles others play with a person who is being integrated can either confirm or infirm social integration.

Turner (1989) suggested a "consensus" principle, where, in a group or setting, there must be a consensus among members about the organization of social roles within the group or setting for individual role behavior to be recognized and effective. The absence of a consensus about roles will place an unwelcome constraint upon collaborative efforts and lead individuals into meaningless activities. Thus, we might conclude from all this that if a person is attributed a role within a setting and that other persons are not able or willing to reciprocate,

this will, in effect, preclude such a person from achieving the role. We can deduce from this an “ambiguity” hypothesis, where if an observer has difficulty making sense of a person’s behaviors (and thus attributing role), then that person’s role behavior is not being appropriately reciprocated by other persons with whom he or she is interacting. Thus, there are culturally acceptable practices that should be used or approximated in order to achieve the integration of a devalued individual within a valued setting.

At a 1999 conference in Boston, I learned of an individual with severe disabilities (nonverbal, profound retardation, and multiple disabilities) who was given a kiosk by a supported employment program, and was, therefore, in the role of “owner of an arts and crafts both at a flea market. The supported employment workers reported that other kiosk owners were unwilling to recognize this individual’s role as an owner and would not invite the person to owner business and, especially, social activities. However, supported employment staff members were invited to participate in these activities.

Presenters at the conference bemoaned the unwillingness of nondisabled people to make room for this individual in their informal lives. However, an alternative explanation is that the supported employment program was very simply engaging in a practice that was an affront to the credulity of the persons who were called upon to reciprocate the role behavior of the owner who had disabilities. There was no fit between the identity and competencies of the supported owner and the role this person was called upon to play. Other people around this individual could not recognize this person in the role, and one might conclude that they had been ill-prepared to receive this individual in the role-setting. In a sense, these folks were called upon to engage in a fiction and to engage in “role-playing” as a pejorative. For integration to occur, others must not only be willing but also able to recognize in the role incumbent the capacity to play a given role in order to be able to reciprocate it. There was no role consensus, and the individual was not recognized as an owner and, thus, remained segregated.

A related point concerns the effects of time on settings and roles. Role settings, and the roles therein, are dynamic and evolve over time (Wicker & King, 1988). In the above example, the flea market kiosk owners might eventually have come around

to acknowledging the legitimacy of the supported kiosk owner who, despite considerable disabilities, persisted in being on the job every day, and whose kiosk might eventually have attracted the attention of a considerable number of customers. Moreover, it takes time for the vicarious experience to lead to learning and the eventual mastery of the behaviors required for a given role and, concomitantly, for the role incumbent, mentors, or coaches to actively engage potential role partners in the setting. I note, however, that the above example shows that undoubtedly well-intentioned social integration strategies sometimes strain the adaptive capacities of role incumbent beneficiaries and members of an already established role setting.

The size of a role setting and the number of people in it are also important considerations that may impinge upon the success of a social integration strategy. Proponents of manning theory (Barker & Gump, 1964; Wicker, 1973) propose the common-sense notion that role settings with fewer role incumbents (settings that are “undermanned”) allow for greater social participation. Large social settings leave many individuals in passive roles, with individuals usually selected for the active and contributory roles by a criterion of competence. For instance, big schools and small schools have about the same number of roles available to potential role incumbents; only so many will be on the student council or members of the various sports teams or social clubs. Barker and Gump (1964) found that small schools left fewer students alienated from the school mainstream and provided much more opportunity for what we would call *personal social integration* and *valued social participation*.

Another important issue concerns the scope of the social integration enterprise. Discussions about social integration often seem to suggest that social integration is about the general participation of a class of individuals within broader society. Ultimately, the success of such a social integration strategy might be judged by the disappearance of an otherwise marginalized class within society. For instance, Irish Americans who at the beginning of the 20th century were highly devalued in American society are now unrecognizable other than through their family names, and this no longer elicits distastefulness or segregation. Thus, social integration is sometimes conceived of as a whole devalued class moving into a community with the litmus test being the number of contacts, acquaintances, friendships, and other relationships that might come out



of a specific person's presence within the community.

A useful way of viewing social integration is by once again returning to an examination of what occurs generally to typical members of society. By and large, social integration for individuals is best viewed as a sum of a person's primary and secondary roles within a number of interconnected or disconnected social settings and groups. The actual integration occurs within each setting and with its role members. Social integration is something that occurs one person and one setting at a time. Indeed, the concept of integration is meaningless without reference to a particular setting, particular role partners, and a particular role incumbency. We might refer to a person's total social integration, which could, thus, be viewed as the social network that a person builds as a consequence of his or her mingling and interacting within many social settings and the concomitant accumulation of positive and valued social roles.

### A Few "Roles of Thumb" for Achieving Social Integration

From the above analysis of roles and normative social integration, we can list a few rules or "roles" of thumb that might serve as a useful guide for successful social integration initiatives, at least from an social role valorization perspective.

1. *One at a time*: Social integration should only be considered one person at a time, in one role at a time, and in one setting at a time. This might actually be viewed as a liberating view point because it leaves one with a do-able objective.
2. *Role-person fit*: Fitting the role to the person by considering the relevant competencies required by the role as well as the interests, affinities, and developmental potential of the purported role incumbent will surely enhance the likelihood of successful social integration.
3. *Setting-role fit*: The ensuring of role availability, preparing the role setting and potential role partners, and the active preparation and even rehearsal of reciprocal role behaviors are all useful intervention tactics that may assist an individual in achieving a valued role.
4. *Small is beautiful*: Choosing smaller undermanned settings increases the likelihood that high competency demands will not disqualify the individual from being acknowledged in a role. Social

integration is more likely in an undermanned setting.

5. *With a little help from my (family or) friends*: At least initially, new secondary roles are usually achieved through the intervention of primary role partners, thus seeking the assistance of family members and family friends might be a good place to start in the organization of social integration interventions. In any event, many individuals will require ongoing informal and/or formal compensatory supports, at least early on.
6. *Roles are developmental*: Roles and roles settings are dynamic and change over time. Time, happenstance, and the action of mentors, coaches, or others in similar support roles are all factors that enhance the likelihood of social integration.
7. *Role cascading*: The successful achievement of a single modest secondary role increases the likelihood of acquiring (being accorded) other secondary roles, and it is the critical mass of secondary roles that increases the likelihood of achieving sought-after acquaintanceship and friendship primary roles.

### Illustrative Sequence of Events Leading to Successful Social Integration

I had occasion to assess a small supported-employment program in a rural community of Eastern Canada. A timid 20-something young woman with moderate mental retardation was placed in a supported employment position at a small weekly newspaper in her hometown. There were a total of six employees, including the owner, all long-time residents of the town. The fact that the young woman's parents were long-time town residents was a key factor, and some of the employees had primary (if distant) relationships with the supported employee (they were family acquaintances).

At first, the young woman was a helpee, other employees were helpers, and the owner was the benefactor. Because the staff was undermanned, this woman was challenged, and her role repertoire soon grew to include new roles that eventually went from the menial coffee-server to coffee-maker and to the important job of archival clerk. Over a 3-year period, she went from helpee to employee, and her contribution came to be valued in its own right. The initial instrumental role cascaded into other instrumental roles, and these secondary formal roles grew into new and primary/expressive roles when

the young woman was invited to lunch, and then to TGIF (Thank goodness it's Friday) get-togethers, shopping trips, and parties. This young woman's place in the setting is best viewed as developmental, just as her particular roles have grown and developed. The employees and owner were quite surprised by their colleague's acquisition of new competencies, her enthusiasm, and contribution to the work place. Real integration seems to have occurred, but at the time of the assessment, it was too early to tell if real friendships would blossom from these initial setting-specific roles.

## Discussion

Mere presence in a mainstream milieu, where one might find any number of typical members of the population, does not seem to automatically lead to the desirable "real" integration of individuals who have disabilities. Moreover, it would seem that current programs and intervention techniques have not yet been able to bring individuals with disabilities into greater participation into mainstream society.

For the social integration conundrum, social role valorization, with its emphasis on the importance of social roles, provides important insights: (a) Social integration is a normative developmental process that is the experience of people generally. (b) "Real" integration is a social integration that occurs in a valued setting, where an individual who has a disability has a valued social role that brings about interactions with valued members of society. Thus, real integration is not simply the opposite of social isolation. (c) Starting from the knowledge of how social integration occurs generally, social role valorization suggests that the real integration of devalued persons requires a special case intervention strategy that is well-grounded in a social role theory. Real integration is more likely to occur if one takes the time to replicate, what could be called *normative social integration*.

In this article I have not suggested that analyzing social role valorization will lead to an expedited social integration strategy. For instance, Heal (1999) proposed that personal competence might limit the achievement of normalization and social role valorization for individuals, and, by extension, the achievement of social integration. Very simply, a given physical or cognitive disability might preclude an individual from achieving a social role without the benefit of some compensatory support

that potential role partners might, at least initially, find problematic and a barrier to interaction. The developmental perspective of social role valorization, however, provides some solace. As we have seen, with time, even very limited secondary roles can grow very surprisingly into other more important secondary roles and these, in turn, can develop into a few primary roles, and the good things in life. None of this is magical, and there are no short cuts. However, social role valorization describes a well-worn and recognizable path, which should, at the very least, assist potential valued role partners to appropriately recognize, acknowledge, and interact with an individual who has disabilities and who is taking up a new role in their midst.

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Received 7/6/04, first decision 8/23/04, accepted 3/2/05.

Editor-in-Charge: Steven J. Taylor

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