

## Social Role Valorization News and Reviews

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My intent for this column is four-fold.

(a) Briefly annotate publications that have relevance to SRV. Conceivably, some of these might be reviewed in greater depth in a later issue of this journal. Many of these annotations should be useful not only as teaching resources, but as pointers to research relevant to SRV theory.

(b) Present brief sketches of media items that illustrate an SRV issue.

(c) Present vignettes from public life that illustrate or teach something about SRV. Aside from being instructive to readers, persons who teach SRV will hopefully find many of the items in this column useful in their teaching.

(d) By all the above, I hope to illustrate and teach the art and craft of spotting, analyzing, and interpreting phenomena that have SRV relevance.

### Research Reports of Relevance to SRV

Many people assume that unless a research study defines itself as concerned with a normalization or SRV issue, it is not relevant to these. This attitude underlies the claim by so many critics of normalization/SRV that these theories have no research base. Yet the studies reviewed below illustrate how invalid such a critique is. None of them set out to study or test normalization or SRV, yet all are directly relevant to normalization and SRV theory.

Palmer, D. (1980). The effect of educable mental retardation descriptive information on regular classroom teachers' attributions and instructional prescriptions. *Mental Retardation*, 18(4), 171-175. Even if teachers' images of pupils who were given a deviant label by an experimenter were not influenced by the label alone, the deviant label "anchored" teachers' perceptions of a pupil's likely low ability attributes, even if contrary evidence might subsequently be presented. In the author's words, it appears that an accumulation of deficit-oriented information can very much affect a person's orientation to the group viewed as deviant.

Calhoun, L. G., & Calhoun, M. L. (1993). Age-appropriate activities: Effects on the social perception of adults with mental retardation. *Education & Training in Mental Retardation*, 28(2), 143-148. A retarded adult was videotaped under two conditions, one in which she engaged in leisure activities typical for her age as a young woman, and a second in which her leisure activities were those appropriate for a much younger person. Subjects who viewed the videotape with the age-appropriate activities estimated the woman's IQ and reading level to be significantly higher than the subjects who viewed her engaged in age-degraded leisure activities.

Molony, H. & Taplin, J. E. (1990). The deinstitutionalization of people with a developmental disability under the Richmond Program: I. Changes in adaptive behaviour. *Australia & New Zealand Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 16(2), 149-159. This study found significant increases in daily living, communication and socialization skills in retarded adults within one year of their moving from an institution to a group home, in comparison to a control group. This underlines how even yet more social role-valorizing environments should be able to significantly increase personal competencies even when such environments still fall far short of the ideal.

Adler, T. (1993, April). Competence determined by status characteristics. *APA Monitor*, pp. 18-19. This article summarizes a great deal of psychological research literature that tells us that humans tend to judge the competency of others on the basis of those characteristics of these others that they can observe, but that actually have very limited relationship with competency, such as gender, attire, speech,

gestures, and imputed wealth. Thus, Caucasian males perceived as wealthy tend to get judged to be highly competent. Because there actually are some behavioral correlates of high social status, it is apparently these correlates that are often the cues for observers' inference that a high-status person is competent. Such correlates include talking louder, speaking more rapidly, talking in a more definitive style of discourse, and maintaining eye contact. At the same time, observers do not approve of persons of low status assuming the behavior of those with higher status, when they know who is who. The cues that observers use are almost all used unconsciously.

### **Publications Relevant to Social Role Theory**

Cialdini, R. B. (1993). *Influence: Science and practice* (3rd ed.). New York: Harper Collins College. According to this review of the literature, thousands of tactics of social influence reduce to just six basic principles: reciprocation, commitment and consistency, social proof (i.e., accepting as correct what people around one view as correct), liking (complying more with people one likes), authority (complying more with authority or expert than other figures), and scarcity (less available opportunities are viewed as more valuable). A Tupperware party is an example of a powerful influence technique because it uses four of the above six categories: reciprocity, commitment, social proof, and liking. We can see how much of Cialdini's theory overlaps with SRV theory: imitation and modelling overlaps with commitment and liking, scarcity with the conservatism corollary, social proof with capitalization on cultural values, reciprocation with integration, etc.

Labanowicz, S. (1978). The psychology of wheelchair sports. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 1(1), 11-17. This writer tried to apply normalization considerations to the area of athletic activities by physically handicapped people. He pointed out that certain adaptations for handicapped people stripped sports of realism, or otherwise reflected low expectations on the part of well-meaning personnel. The normalizing approach would insist on maximal retention of the standard rules, equipment, and space of the sports activities. Furthermore, the competitiveness of sports is seen as an essential aspect thereof which permits a person to say realistically that they are either better, as good, or not as good at a certain sport than an opponent or a certain objective standard. Relatedly, it is as important to learn to lose adaptively as it is to win. If rules are changed constantly or inconsistently, no meaningful standard of comparison remains. Another consideration is that things which differentiate a handicapped from a non-handicapped athlete can be held constant in certain kinds of sports. For instance, in archery, mobility is irrelevant, and an able-bodied athlete would have little if any advantage over an athlete in a wheelchair. Rather than juggling the rules, the author suggests that it makes more sense to do in sports with handicapped people what is also done in many kinds of sports for non-handicapped people: have people of approximately similar skill levels compete with each other, rather than pitting persons of greatly disparate skills against each other, or group them with each other.

Himmelweit, H. T., & Gaskell, G. (Eds.). (1990). *Societal psychology*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. We have all heard of social psychology, but some people now call for the drafting of a "societal psychology" which would deal with issues on the highest social levels, whereas social psychology also deals with issues on a very low level of social organization, such as that of groups. American social psychology, in particular, has suffered from relatively low-level approaches, and from the requirements of its own scholarly and research culture which pushes scholars to do narrowly-focused experimental research while ignoring the larger and more contextual issues. A societal psychology looks extremely relevant to many issues of SRV.

Ewert, G. D. (1991). Habermas and education: A comprehensive overview of the influence of Habermas in educational literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 61, 345-378. A lot of critics of

SRV have invoked so-called “critical theory” on their side, but Ewert (1991) has pointed out that the critical theory process described by Habermas emphasizes strategies that are valued by a society, particularly since for most societal problems, there are no technical or scientific solutions, but only value ones—if any. Thus, perhaps the critics who invoke critical theory either are not applying it consistently, or are using it as a club for striking at something they do not like (i.e., SRV), perhaps for reasons of which they are not aware themselves.

### **The Issue of Juxtapositions Among Persons and/or Groups on the Formation of Role and Value Images in the Minds of Observers**

Both normalization and SRV have posited that a major vehicle for forming role and value images about individuals or classes is the phenomenon of juxtaposition. Normalization and SRV theories have identified many kinds of juxtapositions. The one featured in the vignettes below is the one identified in the above heading.

Among the dynamics relevant to the issue of person-to-person, group-to-group, or person-to-group juxtaposition is that SRV teaches that people who are devalued for one reason are apt to be seen as having more in common with people who are devalued for other reasons than with ordinary people. This accounts for the fact that people who are devalued for one reason are highly at risk of having additionally attached to them expectations, images and roles that observers associated with people whom they devalue for other reasons. Also, people have very primitive (hence often very unconscious) ideas that contact with devalued people is contaminating. This idea undoubtedly underlies many customs of shunning, segregation, and ritual that govern interactions with devalued persons. At the same time, people at image risk tend to have their social images upgraded if they are seen positively juxtaposed to valued people. The items below all relate to this issue of juxtaposition.

A senior professor in the area of mental retardation was heard to say something to the effect that a person who had functioned as a teacher for the mentally retarded for 11 years could be fully expected to have become somewhat out of touch intellectually, and in need of some intellectual sharpening. It is interesting that no one would think of making a similar claim for a person who worked for 11 years with objects, or even animals, rather than with people. Thus, we have here another instance of the contagion theory which the mentally handicapped have inherited from the miasmatic theory of disease transmission (i.e., via vapors or “bad air”), and from the ancient fear of leprosy, as noted by the French socio-historian Michel Foucault.

In 1980, Camp Good Days and Special Times was founded in Rochester, NY, as a camp for children suffering from various forms of cancer. The organization subsequently expanded across the state of New York, and in 1989 added a camp experience for children with AIDS. The director of the organization said that it “recognizes the value of getting ill people together with others suffering from the same disease, whatever the disease. It builds a better self-image.” As a general rule, people form self-images that are mirrors of how they are viewed by others. Thus, if in the eyes of observers, children with all sorts of cancers are perceived as “the same” as children with AIDS (which is deeply tainted with fears of contagion), then people who know their social science have much reason to be doubtful that the self-image of these mutually juxtaposed children will be benefited, at least over the long run.

In Hawaii, a transportation service for physically handicapped people is run by an agency that serves the elderly, presumably on the basis that both impaired elderly as well as physically handicapped people need special adapted transportation, but this serves to attach the negative images associated with each group to members of the other group.

Are you MICA? If so, you are “mentally ill—chemically abusing,” as we first learned in 12/93 (from Joe Osburn). (It used to be that chemical abusers were boys who caused explosions in their parents’ homes with their chemistry sets.) Some services have sponsored MICA/AA meetings, which probably

aggravates the image of both groups.

In 1985, a small army of 86 prisoners was doing maintenance and housekeeping work at a state mental institution in South Dakota ( *NASMHPD Studies*, 11/85)—a juxtaposition that probably jeopardized the images of both the prisoners and the mentally disordered people, making the former seem mad and the latter a menace.

A striking example of deviant juxtapositions accumulated at Fairfield Hospital, a mental institution in Newton, CT. In 1988, the facility served children, elderly people, the mentally disordered, the mentally retarded, people with drug and alcohol problems, prisoners—and 23 horses of the ceremonial unit of the state militia ( *Danbury News Times*, 2 Aug. 88; source item from Jean Bowen).

In 1911, a parade of suffragettes carried a banner in a parade that said, “New York State Denies the Vote to Criminals, Lunatics, Idiots, and Women” ( *Time*, 8 July 1991, p. 17).

In the media, members of different devalued classes are often depicted as needing—or benefiting from—being brought together. A good example is an NBC TV program (shown 14 May 1986), “Highway to Heaven,” which brought together a lonely blind woman and a disfigured artist.

A study asked people to make all sorts of judgments about persons shown to them in a variety of juxtapositions on various photographs. Plain-looking women were given low ratings even when shown in the company of very handsome and glamorous men, but men received much more favorable ratings if they were depicted in the company of attractive women. The greatest amount of upgrading was given to short bald men with pot bellies who, juxtaposed to glamorous women, were rated as highly likely to possess intelligence, high spirits, money, power and influence ( *Amerika Woche*, 24/8/85).

The juxtaposition of persons with different devalued conditions with each other is often interpreted as constituting integration, usually by people who erroneously claim to know and endorse normalization or SRV. In Syracuse, the Association for Retarded Citizens has been transporting elderly retarded people to the Salvation Army’s Golden Age Center for elderly people, and everybody involved has apparently been calling this “integration.” Also, this program was carried out under a program rubric that at least started out being imaged as vocational training ( *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, 30/4/89). The same organization sent mentally retarded adults from its sheltered workshop to a local Jewish nursing home to “work” there as “volunteers.” A cerebrally palsied workshop client who can only speak a few syllables, spends his days in a wheelchair, and has very little movement control was one of these “volunteers.” A spokesperson for the association said that the aim of this project was “integration” ( *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, 29/1/92). In fact, the effect is one of deviancy juxtaposition.

An hour-long program called “Look Who’s Laughing,” broadcast on US public television on 29 November 1994, featured six handicapped stand-up comedians: a blind man (Alvarez), a man with muscular dystrophy (Leake), a man with cerebral palsy (Fonseca), a deaf woman (Kelly), a woman with cerebral palsy (Jewell), and a man in a wheelchair whose legs were paralyzed (England). The blind man claimed to have been the first handicapped person to break into the stand-up comedy business in the late 1970s. Overall, the program was very positive, but it contained much grist for an intermediate or advanced SRV analysis mill. For instance, some of the comedians seemed to make their handicap and resultant or at least related life conditions the entire focus of their gig, much as some handicapped activists seem to shape their entire lives around their impairment. In contrast, at least one of the comedians was quite explicit that he could not and did not want to dwell on his condition throughout his comedy routines. Another noted how important it was for both the comedian and audience to at some point “forget” the handicap and attend to the comedian as a performer, not as a handicapped performer. It also appeared to be the case that the comedians who made less of their impairment were those who had been adventitiously rather than congenitally handicapped.

The comedians all poked a bit of fun at the current politically correct terminology around handicap, and

in good part what probably freed them to do so is the fact that they do hold valued roles and lead relatively ordinary lives. Those handicapped people who are especially wounded and who do not enjoy a great deal of integration and valued participation could be expected to be more obsessed with how they are described or what they are called.

In their performances, as well as in the interviews for this program, the comedians made it very easy for the audience to identify positively with them. They were all immaculately groomed and well dressed, they appealed to experiences that they would have in common with their audiences, and they evidenced a sympathy and generosity for well-intentioned non-handicapped people trying to navigate the treacherous waters of interacting with handicapped people today without incurring someone's ire. One even spoke of how important it was to build bridges between handicapped and non-handicapped people. One man noted that when a girlfriend left him because she admitted she did not think she could cope with the burdens that a future life together would entail, he was at first hurt and angry, but then came to appreciate that she had been honest with him, and that it was legitimate for non-handicapped people to say certain things out of honesty.

Several comedy club owners, as well as the comedians themselves, noted that while their handicap might be a gimmick, a "hook" to pique the audience's interest, they had to be able to be funny as well, because no audience would long put up with a bad act just out of pity, nor would any audience or owner want a bad act to re-appear.

On the one hand, the program illustrates the difference between the historic role of the object of ridicule, and the role of comedic performer. In the former, the person was the butt of jokes, teased and ridiculed by others, often in an unkind way. In the latter, the performer makes the audience laugh with rather than at him/her, and because the performer is in charge of what gets said and how, and what gets interpreted as funny, the performer maintains a valued position. However, on the other hand, featuring six handicapped comedians all at once definitely runs the risk of evoking in viewers associations between handicapped persons and the object of ridicule role.

What was not brought out by the program was how people who cannot stand up can be stand-up comedians (Source item from Susan Thomas).

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