

REVIEWS MORE

ADVANCED ISSUES IN SOCIAL ROLE VALORIZATION THEORY. By W. WOLFENSBERGER. Plantagenet, ON: Valor Press, 440 pages, 2012. **REVIEW AVAILABLE ONLINE @ www.srvip.org**

Reviewed by David Race

THE DAY ON WHICH I began this review saw the frequent use of the words 'role' and 'roles' in a very public forum in the UK. At the end of that day, the General Synod of the Church of England, because of an insufficient majority in the House of Laity voting in favour, rejected the authorisation of women to serve in the role of bishop. Given that for over twenty years women had been serving as ordained priests in the Church of England; that in many of the other countries who are part of the Anglican Communion women already serve as bishops; and that the principle of their being bishops had already been adopted by the Synod a year ago, then the competence and ability of women to take up the role was not in doubt. Logic and reason, as well as the great majority of ordinary churchgoers tested in surveys and polls, would seem to have made the move a matter of empirical obviousness. Yet, on the basis of 'religion,' either a belief in a literal interpretation of certain passages in the Bible at the 'evangelical' end, or a desire to 'return to Rome' at the other, a small minority at the extremes of the House of Laity succeeded in blocking the move.

By the time this review appears, there is a remote possibility that the decision may have changed, but my point in beginning this review with the story is twofold. One, to alert the reader to my perspective as coming from the UK, with its quirky, one might even say arrogant, attitude to any issues of reason and religion that appear to come from outside these shores. Second, the timing of the General Synod decision, in the view of the general public, gives the views of Bishops

in the House of Lords no credibility when that House itself, and its representativeness or exclusivity, is under debate. This has parallels with my view, expanded below, that this book is the right book at the wrong time, mainly for reasons which Wolfensberger himself discusses in its pages.

The UK experience of normalization and Social Role Valorization (SRV) has been, in my view, strong in terms of its effects on services for people with learning disabilities, but weak in separating out the empiricism of SRV as a theory. Part of the reason for this, which I have discussed elsewhere (Race, 1999), has to do with the teaching of both normalization (or 'normalisation,' the use of which spelling by people in the UK implies more than just English pedantry) and SRV. This teaching through workshops, including both PASS and PASSING, had a considerable effect on the application of the ideas, but lacked a theoretical backing, especially in the 1980s, when the development of SRV from normalization coincided with the greatest impact of the ideas in practice in the UK. Had such a book as this appeared during that time, the rejection and even hostility to SRV coming from the UK, especially from the academic world, might not have been so great. Wider changes in the academic world and in the world of human services, very much forecast in Wolfensberger's other writings and adduced in this book in chapters four and five, may well have still prevented serious consideration of the empirical validity of SRV even with such a book. As it was, even the 1998 monograph, which is the first exposition of SRV using the 'ten themes,' and my own 1999 text came, in my view, too late for serious attention to be paid to SRV as a social science-based theory, especially in the UK, where the academic disability world was totally dominated by proponents of the so-called 'social theory' of disability, seen as a) originating in the UK and b) having the academic recognition not afforded to SRV.

Over a decade later, the book is immensely rewarding to someone like myself, in that it has the depth of argument and logic that I would have found invaluable in my teaching role in various universities in the 1990s and later, but I fear it will largely be confined to what Michael Kendrick, in his Foreword, calls 'insiders.' Kendrick maintains that such is the author's intent, and there certainly is much that rings many bells with those of us who would be classed in that category. This would be especially true in chapters four, five and six.

My opening account of the peculiarly English goings on at the Church of England General Synod fits well into the issues of SRV and 'worldviews and values' discussed in chapter four. Though occasionally letting slip his empirical hat to reveal his own value positions, Wolfensberger lays bare the reality of the power that 'religion,' defined as he does in its broadest sense, has over empirical reason and evidence, even over what is actually defined as empirical. That chapter alone should be recommended reading for all people entering the world of human services with high ideals, though with even further depth given in chapter five, the two combined would serve that purpose even better.

Similar thoughts, but more in terms of general efforts by people to change things for the better, would be held about chapter six, an extended version of Wolfensberger's fascinating and amusing keynote presentation to the 2003 International SRV conference in Calgary. As someone who attended that presentation, I find its written version even more important, and also am again reminded of the 'English experience' of normalization and SRV, and what I consider the greatest period of its impact—the 1980s and early 1990s. Wolfensberger's combination of the literature on change, and his use of the example of the period in the early 1990s when the US Department of Agriculture set up an army of local agricultural specialists all over the country, called "county agents," under a scheme entitled the Cooperative Extension Service, rang many bells regarding successful change

agency in the 1980s and early 1990s by SRV adherents, but also why that declined rapidly thereafter. In particular the notion of 'local champions' being important reminds me of key individuals in local government and NHS services in the UK in the period referred to above, enabling 'hotspots' of SRV implementation to grow in a number of areas, but then to see them diffused as services moved much more to the 'independent sector' and to a market place of welfare. Once again, a reason why this is the right book at the wrong time, though there are at least suggestions in the chapter that are not totally reliant on a reader being an 'SRV insider' to be useful.

Ironically, in view of the foregoing, I would consider the first three chapters, covering an overview of SRV theory, the role of theory in science, and the hierarchy of propositions of SRV, to be entirely suitable for use in teaching SRV, especially in higher education settings. The overview covers the elements well. The discussion of theory in science could fit well into many university courses on research and/or 'evidence based practice,' whilst the propositions of chapter three, essentially a different way to explain the empirical elements of the various ratings in PASSING, could not only be used as pre-PASSING reading but also in courses on service evaluation in which PASSING figured as an element. The probability that this will not happen, again especially in the UK, is outlined by Wolfensberger himself in later chapters, as mentioned, and has to do with the changes in the way higher education has developed in most westernised countries. This would also apply to professional training outside of universities, where so much attention is now paid to risk aversion and the management of welfare, as opposed to direct work with individuals. In fact, again ironically, one of the most promising avenues for SRV now in the UK, though very much on a small localised scale and involving those who are not expecting to make a living from such work, is with parents and carers, as they are being put more and more into positions where they are having to make decisions

for their offspring, to use their ‘individual budgets’ by purchasing services. For them, elements of this book could be useful, especially the overview and chapter six on change agency.

In summary then, from the perspective of a (semi-retired) UK academic, who is still involved in small attempts at implementing SRV, this book has a lot to offer; and in wishing it had come out in the late 1980s, I realise the impossibility of that happening. Even though SRV in the UK remains small, the fundamental injustice of the devaluation of vulnerable people revealed by SRV, like the issue behind the General Synod’s verdict, will not go away. So even in this currently morally benighted country, people will still work to address societal devaluation. For them, this book will be a mixture of comfort, intellectual challenge and support.

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About Social Role Valorization (SRV)

Social Role Valorization (SRV), a human service theory based on the principle of normalization, proposes that positively valued social roles are needed for people to attain what Wolfensberger has described as the good things of life (well-being). This is of particular importance for individuals with impairments or otherwise at risk of being socially devalued by others, and therefore of great importance for human services to them.

About the book

The first two chapters explain SRV, and give depth and background to SRV as an empirical theory that is applicable to human services of all kinds, to all sorts of people. The remaining chapters are all revised and expanded versions of presentations that Dr. Wolfensberger had given at previous international SRV conferences. The topics treated in the chapters move from the general (chapters 2, 3 and 4) to the more specific (chapters 5, 6 and 7).

The contents of the book are especially useful for people who do, or want to, teach SRV; for SRV researchers; and for those interested in implementing SRV in a systematic way, especially in service fields where SRV is new, not yet known, and not widely—if at all—embraced.

About Wolf Wolfensberger, Ph.D. (1934-2011)

World renowned human service reformer, Professor Wolfensberger (Syracuse University) was involved in the development and dissemination of the principle of normalization and the originator of the program evaluation tools PASS and PASSING, and of a number of service approaches that include SRV and Citizen Advocacy.

Book Chapters

- Foreword
- Preface
- Chapter 1: A brief overview of Social Role Valorization
- Chapter 2: The role of theory in science, and criteria for a definition of Social Role Valorization as an empirically-based theory
- Chapter 3: The hierarchy of propositions of Social Role Valorization, and their empiricity
- Chapter 4: The relationships of Social Role Valorization theory to worldviews and values
- Chapter 5: Values issues and other non-empirical issues that are brought into sharp focus by, or at, occasions where Social Role Valorization is taught or implemented
- Chapter 6: Issues of change agency in the teaching, dissemination and implementation of Social Role Valorization
- Chapter 7: The application of Social Role Valorization principles to criminal and other detentive settings
- Conclusion to the book

LIST OF ITEMS TO BE REVIEWED

IN EACH ISSUE OF *The SRV Journal*, we publish reviews of items relevant to SRV theory, training, research or implementation. These include reviews of books, movies, articles, etc. We encourage our readers to look for and review such items for this journal. We will be happy to send you our guidelines for writing reviews, or they are available on our website (http://www.srvip.org/journal_submissions.php). We are open to reviews of any items you think would be relevant for people interested in SRV. We also have specific items we are seeking reviews of. (We strive to include items which might have relevance to: SRV theory, one or more SRV themes, and/or social devaluation. If, however, a reviewer finds that a particular item is not so relevant, please let us know.) These items include:

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