

Social Role Valorization: A Proposed New Term for the Principle of Normalization

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Abstract: The highest goal of the principle of normalization has recently been clarified to be the establishment, enhancement, or defense of the social role(s) of a person or group, via the enhancement of people's social images and personal competencies. In consequence, it is proposed that normalization be henceforth called "social role valorization."

The earliest known uses of the terms "normalization," "normalization principle," or "principle of normalization" were reviewed by me several years ago (Wolfensberger, 1980a). For all practical purposes, we can say that the term was first given prominence by Nirje (1969). Early examples of attempts to implement the concept, though with little emphasis on the term itself, were provided by Bank-Mikkelsen (1969) and Grunewald (1969). I retained the term in my series of elaboration and systematizations of the concept (e.g., Wolfensberger, 1972, 1980a, b; Wolfensberger & Glenn, 1973a, b; 1975a, b; Wolfensberger & Tullman, 1982; Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983). However, the choice of the term "normalization" itself has clearly been unfortunate, one major reason being that relatively few people have found it possible to separate the different meanings attached to it by various users of the term (Wolfensberger, 1980a, b). Also, in part because of its name, people have failed to take the principle of normalization seriously as a tightly-built, intellectually demanding, and empirically well-anchored megatheory of human service and, to some degree, relationships. Any review of the literature (Wolfensberger, 1980a) will disclose that once people hear or see the term "normalization," a large proportion (apparently even the vast majority) assume—usually wrongly—that they know "what it means." Even otherwise scholarly persons have published inane critiques of the principle without citing, or apparently having studied or even become aware of, the major expositions thereof in the professional literature. It is because of the danger of these preconceived associations to the term "normalization" that I suggested (Wolfensberger, 1980a) with grim humor that a totally unfamiliar

foreign or novel word, such as "orthofactorization," might have been preferable.

Ever since 1969, I have attempted to convert the early formalizations of normalization by Bank-Mikkelsen (1969) and Nirje (1969) into a scientific theory that is universal, parsimonious, and congruent with social and behavioral science. I have never been satisfied with the term "normalization," but have resisted a change in name for two reasons: (a) I was unable to think of a superior choice; alternatives suggested by others seemed to be no improvement, and usually even inferior (Wolfensberger, 1980a); and (b) by the early 1970s, the term "normalization" had acquired so much momentum that only a dramatically superior term seemed to warrant the attempt to change it. This opportunity has now arrived, with the advent of two developments.

One development is the recent insight (Wolfensberger & Tullman, 1982; Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983) that the most explicit and highest goal of normalization must be the creation, support, and defense of *valued social roles* for people who are at risk of social devaluation. All other elements and objectives of the theory are really subservient to this end, because if a person's social role were a societally valued one, then other desirable things would be accorded to that person almost automatically, at least within the resources and norms of his/her society. Indeed, attributes of the person which might otherwise be viewed negatively by society would come to be viewed positively. For instance, a person who has hallucinations that would render the person devalued in some cultures might be held in awe and respect in another culture (as among certain American Indian tribes, or in the Arab world) where such phenomena may be considered

manifestations of the divine or of divine favor. Or, in the Far East until recently, a very wealthy person might have his/her hands rendered useless, so that what would be considered a serious functional impairment in the Western world would there be a sign of the person's high status—indeed, so high that everyone would be made aware that the person had all necessary functions performed for him/herself by servants and others. In fact, being seen as filling a valued social role may be the one thing which prevents a person from becoming devalued because of a characteristic which would automatically cast other people who do not have socially valued roles into a devalued status. Even further, a characteristic which of itself is devalued might become valued if it were displayed by a person in a valued social role.

In contrast, people are considered to be of low value when they are not seen as having valued social roles. In consequence, I perceive devalued identity rather than mere differentness as synonymous with deviancy. We know that among other things, being seen as devalued/deviant brings with it three important consequences:

1. Devalued persons will be badly treated. Devalued people are apt to be rejected, even persecuted, and treated in ways which tend to diminish their dignity, adjustments, growth, competence, health, wealth, lifespan, etc.

2. The (bad) treatment accorded to devalued persons will take on forms that largely express the devalued societal role in which they are perceived. For instance, if handicapped children are (unconsciously) viewed as animals, then they may be segregated into settings that look like cages and animal pens, may be located close to zoos or animal laboratories, and their service may be given an animal name, often even the name of an animal that is seen as expressive of the devalued people's identity. Thus, a class for mentally retarded children may be named "The Turtles." Similarly, people perceived to be social menaces (perhaps for no realistic reason) may be served in settings that look forbidding and fortress-like, have (or appear to have) walls, locks, fences, and barred windows, and that are far removed from the rest of society.

3. How a person is perceived and treated by others will in turn strongly determine how that person subsequently behaves. Therefore, the more consistently a person is perceived and treated as being deviant, the more likely it is that

s/he will conform to that expectation and will behave in ways that are socially expected of him/her—or at least that are not valued by society. On the other hand, the more social value that is accorded to a person, the more s/he will usually be encouraged to assume roles and behaviors which are appropriate and desirable, the more will be expected of him/her, and the more s/he is apt to achieve.

In my writings on normalization, I have always stressed that the cultural relativity of who gets devalued points to a two-pronged action strategy: (a) to reduce or prevent the differentness or stigmata (i.e., the overt signs) which may make a person devalued in the eyes of observers; and (b) to change societal perceptions and values in regard to a devalued person or group so that a given characteristic or person is no longer seen as devalued. If a human condition (including what might be considered an affliction) were valued in society, then it would be less likely that people would do bad things to the "incumbent" of such a condition. Instead, the incumbent would be respected and have power; other people would tend to censure anyone who attempted to harm the person; the incumbent would be sought out by others as a valuable associate or friend, or at least as a person one would wish to be perceived as associated with. Indeed, many members of society would try to become more like those people who are highly valued. If the most highly valued people in society were those who had no arms and legs, other people would not only strive to meet their every need, but might even pay dearly to have their own arms and legs removed so as to attain the same identity. If a stuttering person were king, many courtiers would be apt to develop at least a slight stutter, much as for over 300 years, first men and then women across the whole world have worn quite inconvenient and unhealthy high-heeled shoes in imitation of Louis XIV—who introduced them because he was short. Other historical facts which support the above point include the centuries-long custom of women of the upper classes in the Far East having their feet bound so that they become crippled; and in Europe, for hundreds of years, especially during the Renaissance, tens of thousands of males gladly submitted to castration in order to attain the socially valued status of castrato singers. If one were to try to restore the bodies of such voluntarily mutilated people, fit them with prostheses, or teach them various self-help and other functional skills, one might

actually come to be seen, condemned, and avoided as being "deviancy-making."

A New Conceptualization of Normalization Goals and Strategies

In order to pursue the two strategies mentioned above in attempting to attain the goals of socially valued roles and life conditions for (devalued) people, any number of things can or must be done which, for practical and problem solving purposes, can be divided into two large classes: (a) enhancement of people's "social image" or perceived value in the eyes of others, and (b) enhancement of their "competencies." In our society, image enhancement and competency enhancement can be assumed to be generally reciprocally reinforcing, both positively and negatively. That is, a person who is competency-impaired is highly at risk of becoming seen and interpreted as of low value, thus suffering image-impairment; a person who is impaired in social image is apt to be responded to by others in ways that impair/reduce his/her competency. Both processes work equally in the reverse direction; that is a person whose social image is positively valued is apt to be provided with experiences, expectancies, and other life conditions which generally will also increase his/her competencies, and a person who is highly competent is also more apt to be imaged positively.

In recent publications (Wolfensberger & Tullman, 1982; Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983), we have interpreted the above two broad strategy clusters as themselves expressing and utilizing seven core "themes" which will not be further elaborated here: (a) the role and importance of (un)consciousness in human services, (b) the relevance of role expectancy and role circularity to deviancy-making and deviancy-unmaking, (c) the conservatism corollary of normalization, with its implications of positive compensation for people's devalued or at-risk status, (d) the development model, and personal competency enhancement, (e) the power of imitation, (f) the dynamics and relevance of social imagery, and (g) the importance of societal integration and valued social participation. The recent development of Program Analysis of Service Systems' Implementation of Normalization Goals (PASS-ING, a new tool that enables the evaluation of a human service against normalization criteria) contributed much to the insight that normalization can be explained in terms of these seven core themes which capture and express most or all the

ultimate as well as intermediate goals and processes of the principle (Wolfensberger and Thomas, 1983). With regard to human services specifically, one can now conceptualize normalization as implying a hierarchical arrangement of implications, which can be summarized as in the Figure.

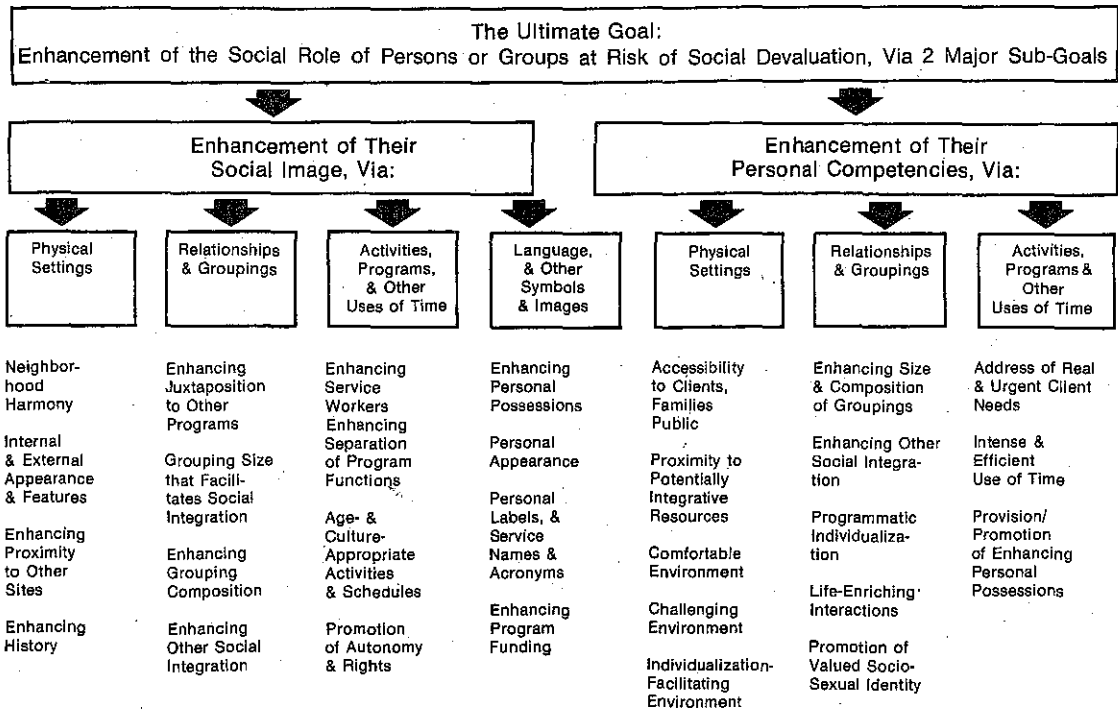
A New Term to Reflect the New Insights

The insight that the creation of valued social roles for people at risk of social devaluation was the epitome of normalization occurred shortly before I discovered that modern French human service language has been using the term *valorisation* to convey the conferring of value onto people, and that in Canadian French, the term *valorisation sociale* has been used during the teaching of the normalization principle since late 1980. This discovery afforded the further insight that the perfect French term for normalization might be something like *la valorisation du rôle social*. A bit of research disclosed that a French encyclopedic dictionary (Larousse) definition of *valorisation* is "giving value ('valeur') to an object or mental representation." *Valeur*, and the root in *valorisation*, come from the same Latin root and have various English equivalents. "Valeur" exists in English usage only as an imported French word, and is not found in many smaller dictionaries. However, the word "valor" (sometimes spelled *valour*, at least in British usage) is a venerable English word that goes back at least to Norman English. Webster's Dictionary gives three meanings to it, the first of which is value or worth. "Valorous" is also defined first as having value or worth, and only secondly as meaning brave.

In combination, the above insights and discoveries suggested that in retrospect, an eminently suitable English term for normalization would be "social role valorization." Valorization itself is found in many dictionaries as meaning "attempting to give a market value or price to a commodity." This arcane meaning is a drawback because it implies the attachment of value to objects instead of people, but this dictionary definition is neither very familiar to most people nor would it appear to constitute a compelling negative image juxtaposition. Further, the word "valorization" has very strong meanings corresponding to what we have been trying to convey, while at the same time it is unfamiliar to most people who, therefore, would be open to being

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Figure
The Hierarchical Structure of Social Role Valorization (Formerly Known as the Principle of Normalization)



furnished with definitions and explanations rather than attaching their own preconceived ones to it. Considering what happens to people's minds when they encounter the simplistic-sounding term "normalization," we can see that it is actually an advantage that the term "valorization" either (a) is devoid of meaning to most people, (b) carries the meaning of "value," or (c) evokes an unrelated technical concept that is relatively meaningless to most people, and is recognized by the few people who know it as inapplicable to the context to which it is being applied. If one gets too concerned about the commercial meaning found in the dictionaries, one may contrast its benign nature with the meanings that one might find in dictionaries for the term "normalization," with its allusions either to a mathematical process (normalizing distributions of measurements by means of mathematical transformations), or as reference to the relationship among countries, where it implies objective and correct diplomatic relationships and perhaps the absence of hostile tensions, rather than the presence of positive valuation.

Unfortunately, I did not discover the French usage of *valorisation* in time to incorporate it into

the most recent update and elaboration of the normalization principle, namely PASSING (Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983), which is now the most detailed explication of normalization application to human services. However, I have concluded that if the term "normalization" is ever to be replaced by a better one, then it must be done now, and I cannot conceive of a better alternative than "social role valorization," though it is important to distinguish between the valorization of the role of the person, and the valuing (or valorization) of the person him/herself.

It seems to me that within a scientific-theoretical framework—which social role valorization largely is—we can only speak in terms of the valorization of the role of a person. When we speak of valuing the person, we step at least partially outside a theoretical framework that is profoundly anchored to empiricism, and into the realm of supra-empirical value systems. Furthermore, it is readily apparent that people might very well possess ideologies which motivate them to value a person, but that this valuation of the person may not imply a construction of valued social roles for that person in society. For instance, we often hear it said (especially from a

religious perspective) that once one values a person, it then becomes irrelevant whether that person occupies a valued social role in the eyes of others and "the world." Yet even if one values a person or group, one might still engage in actions which contribute greatly to the further extensive devaluation of the roles of that person or group in the eyes of others. One can readily cite examples of this. For instance, a lot of people who say they value mentally retarded persons will do nothing to reduce the negative images commonly attached to these persons, enhance their competencies, help them to overcome infirmities, or to acquire habits of socially valued grooming, and so on. Such things may be dismissed as unimportant by the valuing observer, perhaps even with the argument that these things are unimportant before God. Such an orientation often results in a defiant challenge to "the world" to similarly value the person regardless of the person's identity and characteristics.

That such an appeal has merit and validity I do not question, but I do assert that it is almost totally ineffective in bringing about the desired goal. As any unbiased reading of history will reveal, social devaluation and division is so thoroughly laid into human mentality that obviously, people need all the help they can get to overcome these baser inclinations. Furthermore, genuine personal valuation cannot be merely a verbal abstraction but must manifest itself in behavior vis-a-vis people at risk of devaluation. One of the first steps in getting people to be less devaluing is to get them to approach the negatively charged (or at least ambiguous) stimulus object, i.e., a person with devalued characteristics. Again, it is a well-established empirical phenomenon that positive attitude change is not brought about by social contact alone, but by social contact which the actor experiences as positive and pleasurable. This goal can be promoted very powerfully by the various social role valorization strategies.

In terms of practical word use, one would speak of things being "social role valorizing" rather than normalizing, although the adjective "normative" is still useful in some contexts, especially as the concepts of what is normative and valued in a culture are still of the highest relevance to social role valorization. (However, the caveats as to the concept of "norm" or "normative" discussed by Wolfensberger, 1980a, should be noted.) Thus, I submit the term "social role valorization" to the field as a replacement for "the principle of normalization," and have begun to use it in my teaching and in the workshops

which our Training Institute offers. I believe that adopting this new term is not only a more accurate descriptor of what the theory of normalization has been all about, but that just as importantly, the phrase can serve as a very instructive consciousness raiser to those who hear and use it.

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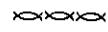
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