'The Desire for Friendship Comes Quickly, Friendship Does Not': An Exploration of Valued Roles & Relationships

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Introduction

ARISTOTLE'S QUOTE–"The desire for friendship comes quickly. Friendship does not"– speaks to a deep human need and longing. People with a valued status, as well as those with a devalued status, share aspirations for friendship and love relationships. The latter group refers to those people who have characteristics that are negatively valued in society and community and who consequently experience ostracism and atypical life experiences.

All people with a devalued status, regardless of the cause of their devaluation, could be asked, 'What would your ideal life look like?' The answers, if unfettered by low expectations, are likely to resonate with the phrase, 'a life like anyone else.' Variants of this phrase include 'a typical life,' 'an ordinary life' and 'a life of meaning.' There is generally broad agreement in Western cultures that the good things of life typically include such things as having a home, spending one's time meaningfully, loving and being loved, having a range of relationships, contributing, having control over things that matter, safety and financial security. The importance of the deep feeling of belonging and acceptance is a human need and thus is shared by all. The feeling of deep fulfillment that comes from having a love relationship of trust, respect and deep liking is a gift, human to human.

The theory of Social Role Valorisation (SRV) posits that if someone is in valued roles, then it is more likely that they will have access to the good things of life (Wolfensberger, Thomas & Caruso, 1996). Further, the theory identifies a number of recurring principles and actions that have the potential to contribute to devalued people having the good things of life. This article explicitly looks at one aspect: that of freely given relationships, and examines the contribution of socially valued roles to the development of relationships.

The article arises from a deep concern at the disparity seen in services and in families where there is a wish for the development of friendships but an absence of theory and strategic practice that is likely to lead to relationships with people who are not paid to be in the person's life.

There are four sections to the article. It firstly contextualises the topic of roles and relationships within the broad theme of community integration, describing what SRV offers to the topic. The article then names two dominant experiences of people with a devalued status: the experience of witnessing life and the experience of community presence. It goes on to examine the likelihood of relationships arising from social participation roles. Five implications arising from the theory of Social Role Valorisation are then identified.

Community Integration

DESPITE WIDE ACCEPTANCE of the importance of all people participating in public life, participating in cultural life, and liv-

ing in the community (see for example the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), there is surprisingly little progress in the community participation of people with disability (Verdonschot et al, 2009). In their systematic review of the literature, Verdonschot *et al* concluded that not only did few researchers actually base their research on a theoretical framework, but many researchers did not actually define what they meant by community participation.

Some literature describes the preconditions likely to lead to better community participation. For example, when Heller *et al* (1998) contrasted the experiences of people in nursing homes and community settings, it was found that the size and types of settings affected the development of adaptive behaviour, health, opportunities to make choices and autonomy. In their own longitudinal study, they found that it is not only size and type of facility that affects outcomes. When there were higher levels of autonomy and control, competency development, and personalisation of the environment, there was increased community participation. Similarly, the research found that having control over decisions about where they live was a factor for people with intellectual disability (McConkey et al, 2004) and people with psychiatric disabilities (Gulcur, Tsemberis, Stefancic & Greenwood, 2007), increasing the likelihood of greater levels of integration.

Examining community integration through the lens of SRV theory provides both a theoretical framework as well as helpful definitions. Following their literature review, Flynn & Aubrey (1999) described the SRV definition as the 'richest and most useful' (p. 296). What SRV offers to an understanding of community integration is the power of being in valued roles. The link between SRV and community integration is made most explicit by Lemay who writes:

> (valued) social participation requires a (valued) role in a given (valued) context; personal social integration is said to be oc-

curring when an individual is engaged in (valued) reciprocated role activities with other (valued) role incumbents in a given (valued) social setting. (2006, p. 5)

Within SRV theory, community integration can be understood as a combination of 'personal social integration' (PSI) and 'valued social participation' (VSP). Wolfensberger (1998, p. 123) defines this combination as the "adaptive participation by a socially devalued person in a culturally normative quantity of contacts, interactions and relationships with ordinary citizens, in typical activities, and in socially valued physical and social settings."

There are a number of conditions that need to be satisfied for someone to experience PSI and VSP. Firstly, 'adaptive participation' refers to the distinction between someone being dumped in community and someone developing those adaptive behaviours and skills to enable them to engage in community life. The former situation is clearly evident when someone moves from a segregated and congregated environment to one 'in the community' without supports in order to thrive 'in the community.' This is also apparent in those situations where an argument has been used that claims the 'right' of someone to be in community. However, if support is not provided to the person or others, then it could be difficult to make the experience good for all parties.

Secondly, the definition makes clear that integration is not simply about being present in community. The definition refers to with whom the person is engaged, what the person is doing and where the person is engaged. With regard to the 'with whom,' the definition refers to the requirement of a quantity of interactions and relationships being what would be expected for anyone else of a similar age, gender and culture. In other words, the yardstick for the number and type of relationships is whatever is culturally typical for that age, gender and culture. Thus, the definition is about *personal* social integration. It refers to

the experience of an individual and the range of relationships that one could expect with friends and family, those people who are seen as regular acquaintances, those who might be considered 'nodding' acquaintances, those who are paid–such as the librarian, shop assistant and electrician–and those from generic human services such as the doctor and hairdresser.

The SRV construct of 'culturally valued analogue' provides a framework to think about how people have their needs met in as ordinary a way as possible. This article is therefore grounded in a consideration of how ordinary citizens, even if unconscious of this dynamic, use their roles to meet people and develop a range of social contacts, acquaintances, friends and intimate relationships. For example, it is constructive to consider that ordinary citizens need to have a large number of acquaintances in order to make a fewer number of friends and in order to have a love relationship (in addition to and other than family).

Valued social participation, according to the definition, must occur in ordinary (valued) places where there are other people with a valued status. Valued activities typically occur in valued settings. For example, shopping occurs in malls; football occurs on a field; tertiary study occurs in colleges or universities; work occurs in a business premise. An appreciation of valued social participation leads to an understanding of the importance of being in culturally typical places and activities of life.

Roles & Relationships: The Problem

Having explored how SRV informs our understanding of community integration, the following section explores the nature of the problem for many people with a devalued status. The problem is described as the difference between having the aspiration for belonging, freely given relationships and engagement in community life, and not experiencing it. The theory of Social Role Valorisation rests on a description of common negative life experiences (called wounds) and their impacts. The lack of

relationships with people with a valued status and the lack, or diminishment, of engagement in community life are expressions of the wounds of rejection and being distanced from community spaces and ordinary people both physically and socially. This can lead to two sets of experiences for people with a devalued status: witnessing and community presence.

The Experience of Witnessing

It is within what is culturally typical that most people have some times when they withdraw from the world, preferring time with, say, a good book or gardening rather than being out and about and with others. The issue for people with a devalued status is that not being part of the world can be the dominant state, when they observe the world through the glass of a window or the screen of a television. This is a form of witnessing life, and occurs especially for those whose main role is that of client, and who live in facilities such as nursing homes. If the facility is located in a rural location and/or far from generic resources, then this 'witnessing' is likely to be exacerbated. The witness experience also occurs among those who are housebound.

This situation highlights the lack of primary roles, which are described by Lemay (2006) as family member and friend. In reality, the person could still have relatives and therefore be in the role of family member. However, if relationships have been fractured or there has been a loss of competencies in performing the role, the person might not be ascribed the role. For example, if someone has dementia and is no longer able to perform the responsibilities of 'mother,' then others around the person might ignore the role and its potential. A lack of consciousness and/or efforts to strengthen primary roles can be devastating for already isolated people.

Having the role of witness-to-life as the dominant role is likely to be a very alienating experience. The impact of realising that one is so different and that this difference is so negatively valued could lead to the conclusion that one cannot be in

the real world at all. This assumption may in turn be internalised and thus become self-fulfilling.

The Experience of Community Presence

Normatively, people have times when they attend a community location such as a park or a generic facility such as a shop. It is an experience of 'being there' with little engagement with people. This is community presence for people with a valued status through the roles of, in these examples, park goer and shopper, and typically form only a very small part of their identity.

Yet for people with a devalued status, community presence is commonly much more identity-defining, because much more time is spent in these types of roles. If people live in a group home or hostel, if they attend a sheltered workshop or day service, and if other parts of their lives are dominated by specialist services like therapies or doctors, then these experiences are likely to lead to a service life as opposed to a community life. If the people are not part of the neighbourhoods–even though the buildings are located in ordinary neighbourhoods–then it is highly probable that a person experiences community presence but not community participation.

Many service workers for people with a devalued status and many family members express a wish for a person to be 'somewhere' or to do 'something.' This typically means that they want the person to be out of the house and doing something. What the wish is likely to lead to is doing activities within a service program. It is not likely to lead to friendships with ordinary citizens because the person is not engaged in community life in any way that is likely to lead to the person being known or perceived other than in a client role, and with the possibility of a relationship other than with paid service staff being formed.

Abbott and McConkey (2006) showed that physical presence does not guarantee greater social contacts with people with a valued status. They found that the people themselves reported barriers in terms of their own physical and functional impairments, being cast into the child and client roles, being grouped together with other people with disabilities, the presence of non-integrative features of 'home,' and difficulties in achieving valued social participation in community.

This is exemplified in the following scenario. A person is a passenger in a car and is taken by paid staff to a park, a mall or a coffee shop. It could be argued that people are then in the roles of park goer, mall goer or café patron. If the need of the person was to develop skills in being in public spaces, then these roles could be an appropriate starting point. However, if the intention was longer-term relationships with ordinary citizens, then roles that give only community presence are insufficient.

A second example is when a person might be described as being in the role of, for example, bowler in those instances where someone is taken to a generic facility like a bowling alley. However, if they only go when no other citizen-bowlers are there and/or only go with other people with whom they share some form of devalued status, then this too can only be considered to be community presence. It is not the sort of participation referred to in the definition of PSI and VSP, and instead creates a 'dip in, dip out' experience of community life. For some people, such as those who have spent years in an institution and who have fractured family relationships, this might be a legitimate introduction to community. However, for those whose dominant roles (the roles in which they spend the most time) are client, resident and patient, and if the only valued roles are those such as café patron, park goer and shopping mall goer, then this set of roles indicates a life merely of community presence.

There is a sense that the person is 'visiting' community, and some funded programs actually use the language of 'community access' whereby the service helps people go to the shops, movies, etc., accompanied by a worker. This is the experience of being a 'stranger in a strange land.' If the service system did not function as the receptacle for the person with a devalued status, then it would not need programs

to return the person, albeit briefly, to community life. Even in these roles, there is little participation in community life, and little or no engagement with people with a valued status. The shopkeeper could be considered as a social contact, but unless there is regular contact over a long period, it is highly unlikely that this contact would develop past even the acquaintance stage nor bring with it greater access to the good things of life. In this scenario, it is clear that relationships given in a freely given way by people with a valued status are minimal.

One of the issues about roles that bring (only) community presence is that they have a very narrow bandwidth (Wolfensberger, 1998, 31; Tumeinski, 2010), which means that they open very few doors to other roles. There is some surprise about this by proponents of community living who believe that going to, say, the same coffee shop for weeks and even months will result in a freely given relationship. Typically, citizens go to coffee shops, parks and malls with friends, not to make friends. Thus, the strategy of being a café goer is an atypical strategy. There is a small chance of success in building relationships only if other community members are also in the role of 'regular' [café patron], if they go to these settings to meet people and if there is deliberate and strategic work done to encourage relationship building.

In Pursuit of Valued Social Participation *&* Personal Social Integration Through Valued Roles

A systematic review of multiple research findings conducted by Verdonschot et al (2009) found that overall, people with intellectual disability had smaller social networks, most of their relationships were with paid workers, they were less often employed, less likely to be involved in community groups and more likely to participate in recreational activities with others with a disability and paid staff or to engage in leisure alone and in a passive way. The major finding was that there is greater community participation for those people who live in community settings than those in segregated settings, but that the level of community participation is still significantly less when compared to people without impairments.

People with a valued status take social participation for granted. It is done within the context of having a typical lifestyle in valued settings and doing valued things with other valued people. This typical lifestyle brings the benefits of purpose, meaning and relationships. For people with a devalued status, valued social participation is more likely to happen if the person is in valued social roles. Roles can enable a person to be engaged in a valued activity in a valued physical and social setting. Examples would be roles such as tenant, host, club member, student, ball boy, employee and volunteer. The challenge is to consider the link between roles, participation and relationships.

Relationships are at the heart of a community life. McMillan and Chavis (1986; cited by Obst, 2004) define a 'sense of community' as a "feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together."

To understand social participation, it is helpful to think about the 'forms' that participation takes. This article suggests that there are two forms of social participation: task participation and relationship participation. Task participation is the engagement of people in a task such as a work task like photocopying or a recreation task like stamp collecting. Relationship participation is where there is engagement with people in a group of two or more.

The distinction is made because the different forms of participation will give different outcomes. If the desired outcome is friendship, then there must be either both forms of participation or at least relationship participation. If the desired outcome is belonging, then both types of participation will be helpful. The latter can be understood in light of Jean Vanier's definition of belonging: belonging is being missed when one is not there (McCalmont *&* Flemington, 1968).

One could be missed through task participation roles because one's contribution *through* the task will be missed. One could be missed through relationship participation roles because one's personal gifts and attributes are likely to be missed.

Task participation could be done alone, such as performing a work task in an isolated space in a business premise. In such a situation, there could be belonging, but not a friendship. Relationship participation is less likely to be done without task participation, but it is possible such as when groups of friends gather for a chat. Being involved in family celebrations is an example of relationship participation through a primary role and could be with or without a task participation role.

A merging of relationship roles and task participation roles is exemplified in roles such as work colleague, sports team member and choir member. These show how a secondary role, like sports participant, which is both a task and relationship participation role, could develop into the primary role of friend. However, the problem for people with a devalued status is that few get to be in either task participation or relationship participation roles. This could explain people's social isolation, low engagement with community life and loneliness.

Lemay (2006) also describes the notion of role cascading, where more roles become available once one is in a role with a wide bandwidth. These dynamics are illustrated in the work of Patterson and Pegg (2009) who describe casual leisure roles as largely passive, intermittent and requiring low levels of skill or training. They contrasted 'casual' leisure roles with 'serious' leisure roles, the latter being the systematic pursuit of "amateur, hobbyist or volunteer [roles]" (p. 390). The activities in these roles become "a central life interest" (p. 391). What can be seen here is the link between roles and identity. They also found that people reported that the roles increased skills, which opened the door to other roles (such as the role of volunteer progressing to a paid employee role) and relationships with others who were also pursuing the interest or hobby.

In a study by van Alphan *et al* (2010), in which they interviewed neighbours of people with disabilities living in ordinary neighbourhoods, an illustration of not utilising the benefits of role cascading is evident. One could assume that each person with a disability was also nominally in the role of neighbour. However, the interviews revealed not that neighbours had negative attitudes to their neighbours with disability, but rather that there was a perception that the 'care home' was a business rather than a real home. Consequently, there was a lack of surety about what to expect from the 'neighbours.' One of their conclusions was "staff may help residents and neighbours in identifying possibilities to engage in mutually acceptable forms of neighbouring, taking into account the ambivalence, capabilities and insecurities of both" (p. 361). This is an illustration where the role of tenant led to the role of neighbour, but the role of good neighbour was not optimised.

In summary, if it is personal social integration and valued social participation that is desired, then enabling people to have roles that enable task participation and relationship participation will be necessary. A consciousness of roles that cascade to other roles will also be helpful.

Implications

THE LIMITS OF ROLES that lead only to witnessing life or community presence have been shown. The potential of task participation and relationship roles to lead to friendships and belonging has also been shown.

In light of these assertions, there are five implications from an application of SRV theory: think 'roles;' enable task participation through secondary roles and relationship participation; strengthen primary roles; develop competencies in and for roles; and shape the role signifiers, including the roles of others.

1. Think 'roles'
FIRSTLY, IT IS IMPORTANT to think 'roles.' What

often happens is that those involved in the lives of people with a devalued status think 'activities' or think 'programs.' This is primarily about filling time and 'being somewhere.' As Shevellar (2009) says, "If we start with filling time, then all we'll get is activities. If we start with filling roles, then time looks after itself." Activities and programs will not lead to personal social integration. Nor will they lead to friendships with ordinary citizens or belonging.

The benefits of being in valued roles are well documented. For example, Nordenmark (2004) conducted a longitudinal study in Sweden and found that citizens had better health and well-being when they had multiple (valued) social roles. One of the conclusions was that "a society should encourage its members to engage in a variety of activities and social contexts and to achieve multiple social roles" (p. 124). This article furthers the beneficial effects of valued social roles by exploring the links between roles and relationships.

2. Enable task participation through secondary roles and relationship participation

If the goal is friendship and belonging, then it is important to enable task participation and relationship participation. Friendship and belonging are highly unlikely to develop from roles that only enable witnessing of community life or community presence. In other words, relationships are rarely formed in the absence of a context. Task participation and relationship participation roles provide the context.

Harlan-Simmons *et al* (2001) used intentional strategies to develop valued roles around people's interests as a means of developing relationships. The beginning point was to develop a secondary role for and with the people, such as an exercise class member, a volunteer band member and woodworker. Friendships eventuated from some of the roles; it was reported that there were other

benefits such as expanded networks, interesting things to talk about and increased confidence. Important elements in these intentional strategies included ensuring that the roles involved regular participation in roles that were well matched to the individual's interest, in highly regarded activities with relatively stable group membership, and with consistent support.

3. Strengthen primary roles

The primary roles of, for example, son, daughter, parent, cousin and old friend are fertile grounds for creating stronger personal social integration. This requires a consciousness that these relationships exist, even if they are not active. Secondly, it is required that people are brought together in a meaningful way. Families who involve their aged family member or family member with a disability in all family events are laying the foundation for both personal social integration and valued social participation. Reconnecting people with old friends will foster relationship participation. This might be assisted with ideas of what to do together, that is, task participation.

4. Develop competencies in and for roles

Developing competence for acquiring roles and while in roles is important. More secondary roles are likely to open up when people have a level of competence to perform in them (Lemay, 2006). For example, a longitudinal study in Norway contrasted the lifestyles of young people in the special school system with those in the mainstream system (Kvalsund *&* Bele, 2010). It was found that those students who went through the mainstream system had larger social networks after leaving school. The authors argued that greater resilience was built by being in a mainstream school through increased expectations being held of them, greater likelihood of the development of academic and social skills, and practice in "youth cultural competence of building relationships" (p. 29).

5. Shape the role signifiers, including the roles of others

IF THE PERSON is in the task participation role of say, library user, then the person needs to be surrounded by other library users and librarians, and be in a library so that there are the physical and social environmental role signifiers to help the person to be in the role. There are also implications for the roles of the other party or parties in the person's life. If, for example, the worker is in the role of carer or minder, then the role expectations are largely to 'look after' people. It is unlikely that the person in that role will foster competency development, task participation roles or relationship participation roles.

An Illustration

TWO YEARS BEFORE THE START of this story, Grace attended a day service where other people with disabilities gathered to play games, go on 'outings' and learn what was called 'life skills' while at the service. The people involved in looking out for Grace's wellbeing were concerned that, outside of family life, Grace was experiencing only the witnessing of (real) life and a limited amount of community presence. This was having detrimental effects on Grace's competencies, as well as how Grace was seen by others and how she saw herself. A deep seated wish by all, including Grace, was to have a range of acquaintances and friends in her life, who knew and appreciated Grace for who she really was, to do things with, and who might stand by her when that was needed.

Grace eventually got a job as a part time administration worker. The tasks in her job description were comprised of administrative duties that were 'optimistically realistic' for her in that they were within her capacities yet would still extend her skills. The work in the background involved thinking about Grace's interests and inclinations, what she said she liked, and being very conscious about what needs and vulnerabilities had to be considered in order for Grace to do well.

Over time, Grace's colleagues appreciated her sense of joie de vivre and her caring nature. She asked after people if they were unwell. She never gossiped and never spoke ill of others. She was always on time. The manager considered that these attributes contributed to a good work culture. During work time, Grace spent most of her time with other administrative staff but also mixed with other colleagues during the course of her administration work. Grace always sat with colleagues to have lunch and attended all social activities hosted by the work place. These habits reflected the experiences of relationship participation. Her job tasks reflected task participation.

Grace was missed on those days that she was ill or on holidays, probably for a couple of reasons. Her colleagues missed what Grace brought to the workplace through her ways of being with them and her way of being in the world. They also missed what Grace did for them through her administrative support, for example, the shredding wasn't done, the mail wasn't collected and delivered, and the photocopying was not done. The manager pondered on whether the work colleagues also missed the opportunity that Grace brought to them to be kind.

It is clear to Grace and her family that at work she now has many moments of belonging. Outside of the work environment, relationships have evolved such that an ex-colleague and Grace occasionally go the movies. Another stays in touch via email. Life is still not perfect though: there are still times of loneliness and emptiness which are painful for Grace to experience and for the family to see. In terms of potential, there is a basis for future roles, and deeper and more relationships because of the valued role of worker and the accompanying task and relationship participation. The people around Grace know that this will be a long story of belonging and they have committed to making it happen.

In Conclusion

BEING PART OF COMMUNITY, being in freely given relationships and having the experience of belonging is much more than simply what activities people with a devalued status do and where these activities are. This is instructive for family members, people with a devalued status themselves and for service workers. If the achievement of friendships and/or belonging is the goal, then the key people must consider in which roles the person is supported. Some roles can and will only lead to the experience of witnessing or community presence. If there is a want for someone with a valued status to step forward into the life of a vulnerable person, then there will be a greater likelihood of finding that person if the person with a devalued status is at least in task and relationship participation roles. Only then can friendship and belonging be possible. Community presence is not enough. Community belonging rests on task and/or relationship participation, and this requires thoughtful, diligent, deliberate and often delicate work over an extended period of time. ☙

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Learning to Teach Social Role Valorization (SRV)

Social Role Valorization, when well applied, has potential to help societally devalued people to gain greater access to the good things of life and to be spared at least some of the negative effects of social devaluation. This is one of the reasons why it is important for people to learn to teach SRV, so that its ideas and strategies are known and available to the right people in the right places who can apply it well. Unless people continue to learn to be SRV trainers, the teaching and dissemination of SRV will cease. Many SRV trainers for example could teach lots of people how to **implement** SRV, but not how to **teach** it to others. At a certain point there might be implementation of aspects of SRV, but the knowledge of SRV itself might not be passed on to others, such as the next generation of human service workers. Teaching about SRV, and learning to teach SRV, can be done in many ways, depending in part on one's abilities, interests, resources and so on.

The North American SRV Development, Training & Safeguarding Council has developed a specific model for teaching people to competently do two things: (a) teach Social Role Valorization; and (b) teach other people to teach SRV. The Council named this a "Trainer Formation Model." A description of the Trainer Formation Model is available if you are interested (http://www.srvip.org/about_mission.php); also see the article referenced below.

To find out more about studying SRV and learning to teach it, please contact Jo Massarelli at *The SRV Implementation Project*, 74 Elm Street, Worcester, MA 01609 USA; 508.752.3670; jo@srvip.org. She will be able to help you or to put you in touch with someone more local to your geographic area who can be of help.

Resource
SRV Development, Training & Safeguarding Council (2006). A Brief Overview of the North American SRV Council's Trainer Formation Model (November 2005). *The SRV Journal 1*(1), 58-62.