Self-Determination and Enjoyment Enhancement: A Psychologically-Based Service Delivery Model for Therapeutic Recreation

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This article expands a conceptual model proposed by Dattilo and Kleiber (1993) to a model for therapeutic recreation (TR) service delivery. The original conceptual model explained the relationship between enjoyment and self-determination. The TR service delivery model proposed in this article is comprised of a modified version of the original conceptual model with specific service delivery strategies for each stage of the TR process. It is proposed that teaching participants in TR programs to experience enjoyment and to create environments conducive to enjoyment are important goals for TR service which also contribute to participants’ functional improvements.

KEY WORDS: Enjoyment, Self-determination, Therapeutic Recreation, Service Delivery Model, Leisure Services

In 1993 we explained to therapeutic recreation (TR) professionals and students the conditions of enjoyment and the relationship between self-determination and enjoyment (Dattilo & Kleiber, 1993). The model we developed presented a self-reinforcing and interactive pattern of becoming self-determined, perceiving manageable challenges, investing attention, and experiencing enjoyment. While there may be additional interactions between components of the model other than the relationships identified in Figure 1, the pattern is critical to the experience of enjoyment. This model was developed to expose TR professionals to these ideas and to encourage them to develop services facili-

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tating participants' engagement in this positive cycle.

Although the conceptual model we developed can act as the foundation for a TR service model, it is not a service delivery model. Since TR service models should be theoretically based and should direct practitioners in the process of client intervention (Austin, 1997), this paper extends the previous theoretical model by modifying some aspects of the model and, most importantly, by adding specific service delivery strategies. Thus, in the first part of this paper we clarify the intent of TR services by describing the nature of self-determination and enjoyment (based on our initial model). In the second part we describe aspects of TR service delivery designed to support participants in achieving the goals of self-determination and enjoyment and, ultimately, functional improvement.

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The Purpose of TR

The American Therapeutic Recreation Association and the National Therapeutic Recreation Society (Therapeutic Recreation, n.d.) proposed that the purpose of TR is to treat "physical, social, cognitive, and emotional conditions associated with illness, injury, or chronic disability" (p. 2) through the use of a variety of interventions. While there are other agendas for TR specialists, teaching people, regardless of the type and degree of disability, to create environments conducive to enjoyment is consistent with that purpose. Enjoyment and the creation of environments conducive to enjoyment ultimately contribute to well being (Massimini & Carli, 1988) and to personal growth (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984).

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) considered the great availability of free time "... that somehow fails to be translated into enjoyment" (p. 83) to be one of the most ironic paradoxes. Creating conditions that help concentration, effort, and a sense of control and competence while promoting freedom of choice and expression of preference is the "engineering of enjoyment" (Dattilo & Kleiber, 1993, p. 58). To do this, however, it is helpful to understand the psychology of self-determination, the nature of enjoyment, and factors that interfere with each. Theories addressing self-determination and factors interfering with it provide us with information for developing strategies that enhance concentration, effort, and a sense of control and competence and thus foster enjoyment. Enjoyment refers to Csikszentmihalyi's notion of optimal experience or flow as the experience of intense involvement that is willingly enacted, psychologically absorbing, and ultimately satisfying.

While enjoyment and associated functional development stand well as outcomes and as indicators of self-determination, they also are a precipitating experience. Thus, enjoyment and associated functional improvements serve to reinforce experiences and lead a person on to greater challenges and to higher levels of self-determination. As enjoyment reflects control by the individual, it evokes an orientation for making the most of circumstances and can result in improved physical, social, emotional, and cognitive functioning.

Model Components

The model presented previously (Dattilo & Kleiber, 1993) demonstrated the dynamics of the relationship between self-determination and enjoyment. The components of this model (see Figure 1) include self-determination, intrinsic motivation, perception of manageable challenge, investment of attention, enjoyment, and functional improvements.

Self-Determination. Self-determination involves acting as a primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions free from external influence or interference. Deci (1980) asserted that self-determination involves autonomy, the flexibility and ability to choose options, and the ability to adjust to situations when only one option is available. "When autonomous, people are fully willing to do what they are doing, and they embrace the activity with a sense of interest and commitment" (Deci, 1995, p. 2). Wehmeyer and colleagues (e.g., Sands & Wehmeyer, 1996; Wehmeyer, 1996; Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998) have applied the theory of self-determination developed by Deci (1980, 1995) to people with disabilities.

A goal of many TR programs is to set the stage for people to enjoy themselves. To the extent that self-determination contributes to enjoyment, it is helpful to provide services to people with disabilities that foster self-determination. Self-determination in leisure, which includes the perception of freedom to make choices and the initiation of chosen leisure activities, is essential in facilitating positive leisure experiences for people with disabilities. By creating environments that are option-rich, responsive, and informative, practitioners increase the likelihood of parti-
Participants becoming self-determined. In short, self-determination occurs when people take control of their freedom.

Intrinsic Motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) concluded that self-determination both directs and is directed by intrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated activity energizes behavior and results in feelings of self-determination. Interest, excitement, and relaxation provide reinforcement for activities by increasing or decreasing arousal to an optimal level. These are the experiences most often associated with leisure and recreation and are among the goals of TR interventions.

People who are intrinsically motivated are generally seeking challenges that are commensurate with their competencies; they will avoid those situations that are too easy or too difficult. Individuals who are intrinsically motivated in modulating arousal and seeking challenge are more likely to learn, adapt, and develop competencies that contribute to well being. Fortunately, intrinsic motivation does not depend on a particular level of ability; therefore, interest, excitement, and relaxation can arise with anyone.

Perception of Manageable Challenge. The word used often by participants themselves to describe the subjective experience of intense involvement or absorption is “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The sense of movement that this word implies is created by the merging of action and awareness around the challenges provided by an activity and the feedback that reinforces a person’s ability to meet those challenges. “Flow tends to occur when a person’s skills are fully involved in overcoming a challenge that is just about manageable” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 30).

People with disabilities are often either unaware of the possibilities for challenging experiences, discouraged in the face of challenge, or prevented by others from experiencing challenges. It is important that people learn about the availability of challenging opportunities, be given the chance to engage in challenging activities, and be encouraged to overcome their fears and try. However, individuals must come to believe they can succeed if they are going to risk an uncertain outcome. Once they experience some success, they are less likely to perceive challenging situations as unmanageable.

Investment of Attention. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1997), attention becomes ordered and fully invested when goals are clear, feedback is relevant, and challenge and skills are in balance. From the research of Csikszentmihalyi and others, it is clear that investment of attention involves concentration, effort, and a sense of control. These factors must be understood and managed by facilitators or individuals themselves if attention and depth of involvement are to occur.

Many activities can attract one’s attention. However, to maintain the person’s attention, activity typically must become more challenging, in keeping with the individual’s expanding skills. In addition, if a person’s skills decrease as a result of a progressive disorder or the side effects of medications, the challenge associated with an activity must be reduced accordingly. In any case, the challenge associated with activities must be constantly evaluated and changed to meet fluctuations in people’s ability to perform.

Enjoyment. Enjoyment is the experience derived from investing one’s attention in action patterns that are intrinsically motivating. The activity may be so compelling in and of itself that one becomes deeply absorbed in it and loses consciousness of self and awareness of time. Enjoyment is consistent with concentration, effort, and a sense of control and competence.

Enjoyment is often used colloquially as the equivalent of “fun,” simple positive affect, or pleasure; but we are using it here, as Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990, 1997) and others have (e.g., Massimini & Carli, 1988), to reflect a considerable degree of psychological involvement as well. An activity is assumed to be enjoyable, then, when it com-

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mands sustained attention on its own and when it brings positive feelings.

**Functional Improvements.** While enjoyment is a worthy goal of TR services, improvement associated with physical, emotional, social, and cognitive functioning is important as well. When participants independently access enjoyment and create environments conducive to enjoyment, functional improvements should result. Massimi, Csikszentmihalyi, and Delle Fave (1988) concluded that enjoyment motivates people to do things that push them beyond their present ability and contribute to their functional development. Although not extensively documented, research suggests that enjoyment contributes to functional improvements (e.g., Frewen, Schomer, & Dunne, 1994; Middleton & Byrd, 1996; Paxton, Browning, & O'Connell, 1997).

**TR Service Delivery**

Strategies facilitating self-determination, intrinsic motivation, perception of manageable challenge, and investment of attention, which ultimately contribute to enjoyment and functional improvement, are depicted in Figure 2 and are described below. Self-determination can be enhanced when people are encouraged and supported to become aware of themselves in leisure contexts, make decisions and choices, communicate their preferences, and set goals. Intrinsic motivation is enhanced when people focus on internal standards, emphasize inherent rewards, listen to informative feedback, and become aware of their interests. These patterns can be facilitated (or disrupted) by service providers. To increase the chance that participants consider the challenge of an activity to be manageable, they can be encouraged to assess their skills, make adaptations, make realistic appraisals of challenges, and develop activity skills. Practitioners can recognize and avoid sending messages that undermine self-direction and creating conditions that are distracting. Teaching participants to make accurate attributions relative to their successes and failures encourages investment of attention and enjoyment. In turn, generating enjoyment can help facilitate functional improvements.

**Self-Determination.** Sands and Doll (1996) suggested that if people are to be self-determined, they must understand their strengths, limitations, and unique learning needs, and they must know how to use these attributes to enhance their quality of life. Since awareness is "basic to all learning, growth and positive behavioral change" (Barry, 1997, p. 6), a valuable TR service is to assist participants to explore, discover, and develop an awareness about themselves in leisure contexts. An aspect of self-determined leisure then is engaging in self-examination (cf. Hoge, Dattilo, Schneider, & Be misderfer, 1997). More specifically, participants can be encouraged to develop an awareness of themselves in a leisure context through a processing strategy known as "debriefing." Typically, debriefings consist of a series of questions which require participants to reflect, describe, analyze, and communicate about an activity (Brackenreg, Luckner, & Pinch, 1994). People who internalize the meaning associated with the experience are in a position to apply that learning to other aspects of their lives (Knapp, 1990).

As people develop an awareness of their leisure interests, Lord (1997) suggested that professionals should cultivate decision-making skills related to leisure participation. If leisure services are to foster independence, then it is imperative that participants be encouraged to make decisions (Mahon, 1994; Mahon & Bullock, 1992). Making timely and correct decisions leads to a sense of personal effectiveness and interest which, subsequently, promotes investment of attention and enjoyment. People who do not possess the decision-making skills needed for activity involvement are more likely to acquire these skills if they participate in recreation activities and are given considerable autonomy in doing so. Decisions about leisure involvement can be stimulated by having
people identify others who could serve as resources, locate facilities providing recreation activities, learn about participation requirements, and obtain answers to questions (Dattilo, in press). Participants can be encouraged to evaluate their decisions, determine the effectiveness of their decisions, and given similar circumstances, decide whether they would act in a similar fashion or change.

To encourage self-determination, professionals promote autonomy by supporting initiation of activities (Foxx, Faw, Taylor, Davis, & Fulia, 1993; Faw, Davis, & Peck, 1996; Searle, Mahon, Iso-Ahola, Sdrolias, & Van Dyck, 1995; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). To support these initiations, practitioners can provide participants with opportunities to express preferences, allow them to make choices regarding their leisure participation, and permit them to experience outcomes based on their choices. The strength in TR services may be in addressing the issue of choice (Searle, Mahon, Iso-Ahola, Sdrolias, & Van Dyck, 1995), and in Deci’s (1995) view, “choice is the key to self-determination . . .” (p. 10).

Communication is important to self-determination in that effective communication facilitates involvement with others. Many people with disabilities rarely initiate conversations and frequently assume the subordinate role of respondent (Dattilo & Camarata, 1991; Dattilo & O’Keeffe, 1992). One way to create a supportive environment which stimulates participants to communicate preferences and thus, promotes self-initiated leisure is to approach participants, attend to them, and give them adequate time to respond (Dattilo & Light, 1993).

Activity is conducive to enjoyment when
it has clear goals (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In many activities the goals are implicit, and therefore, goal setting is not important. For example, when completing a painting, the main concern is to develop the skills which, when used, result in recognizing a finished product. However, one role of service providers is to encourage participants to set goals when the goals are not apparent and work toward achieving them (usually problem-solving in the process) within an environment which fosters interdependence. According to Deci (1995), “...goals need to be individualized—they need to be suited specifically to the person who will work toward them—and they need to be set so as to represent an optimal challenge” (p. 152). Clear goals provide direction and facilitate enjoyment as these goals are achieved; however, goals that focus attention on winning (Deci & Ryan, 1985) or beating the other team (Deci, 1995) rather than doing well can be problematic since a focus on winning makes the activity an instrument for winning rather than something enjoyed for its intrinsic properties (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994).

An environment which facilitates self-determination can be established by encouraging participants to become aware of themselves in leisure, make relevant decisions, make meaningful leisure choices, communicate these choices, and consider the actions taken once choices have been made. From Deci’s (1995) perspective, self-determination is reinforced in settings where interventions are being applied and individuals do activities “...of their own volition, at their own initiative, so they will go on doing the activities freely in the future when we are no longer there to prompt them” (Deci, 1995, p. 91).

Intrinsic Motivation. A key question proposed by Deci (1995) that TR specialists attempt to answer is “How can people create the conditions within which others will motivate themselves?” (p. 10). Intrinsic motivation is reinforced to the extent that chosen behavior continues without disruption from extrinsic influences and is owned by the individual and/or is personally satisfying. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), “The most important step in emancipating oneself from social controls is the ability to find rewards in the events of each moment” (p. 19). Participants’ choices can be reinforced and a focus on participation outcomes can be minimized, thereby having participants emphasize inherent rewards. If trophies, prizes, or other consequences are used to reward learning and successful participation, they can undermine intrinsic interest by changing the interpretation of the event (e.g., “I did it for the prize” rather than “I did it for the fun of it”). Mannell and Kleiber (1997) warned that

When people are rewarded for listening to music, playing games or volunteering, their behavior can become overjustified; that is, they may begin to attribute their participation to extrinsic motives. Research has suggested that such overjustification can be dangerous. The introduction of extrinsic rewards tends to undermine people’s experience of self-determination . . . . (p. 138)

If extrinsic rewards are given, it is helpful to structure rewards so that they provide positive feedback, which either affirms a sense of competence, if competence is the issue (Koestner, Zuckerman, & Koestner, 1987), or provides them with clear task feedback (Sansone, 1986). Therefore, it is useful for participants to learn to listen to positive feedback. Where rewards are informative rather than controlling, they are least likely to undermine intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975).

Task feedback refers to the information that conveys to people how well they are doing various aspects of the activity, or how well they are improv-
ing their activity performance, or how well they are doing by certain accepted standards. In this way the individual’s performance is not compared to that of others; rather, the focus is on acquisition of the skills needed to master the activity at individually enjoyable levels. (Iso-Ahola, in press)

Although competition is a common feature of many recreation activities, when beating an opponent takes precedence over performing as well as possible, enjoyment tends to disappear. “The real function of competition could be viewed as providing challenge—as providing an opportunity for people to test themselves and to improve—and in the process have fun” (Deci, 1995, p. 69).

A focus on winning is often associated with direct competition, which involves pitting a person against another. Focusing on competition against internal standards is identified by Ross and Van den Haag (1957) as indirect competition. By focusing on indirect rather than direct competition, attention to task and associated enjoyment can be promoted, and negative emotions such as animosity (Kelly & Thibaut, 1969) and impaired performance and aggression (Deutsch, 1969) can be avoided.

Intrinsic motivation must be elicited before it can be maintained. As suggested previously, intrinsic motivation is generated as a matter of interest in the environment and what one might do to feel optimally stimulated and competent. Helping participants to become aware of their interests involves some self-examination (referred to in the previous section on self-determination); however, it will likely require exposure to possibilities as well. Although observing others enjoying an activity may be one way to promote interest, direct participation is likely to be a critical way to stimulate interest.

Perception of Manageable Challenge. In some cases, however, the best decision-making skills, the greatest exposure, or an environment rich with feedback may fall short of bringing enjoyment if challenges are far too little or too great or are perceived to be so. To improve the likelihood of a good match between challenge and skills, participants can be encouraged to assess their skills. If an imbalance exists between the degree of challenge in an activity and participants’ skills, barriers may be created to leverage participation. For instance, if a specific activity is too easy for participants, boredom and frustration often result; however, if an activity is too difficult, anxiety and frustration can occur (Ellis, Witt, & Aguilar, 1983).

One way to reduce barriers created by an imbalance of skills and challenge is to make adaptations associated with recreation activities. Adaptations can change the challenge associated with an activity to meet participants’ abilities. When adapting activities, materials are chosen specifically to meet the needs of the participants, or the specific cognitive, physical, or social requirements associated with an activity may be changed. Environmental adaptations such as reducing the size of the playing area to minimize the distance traveled for people with limited mobility and endurance may be necessary to bring about the active involvement of participants. Finally, it can be helpful to examine possible ways to modify instructional strategies to teach people with disabilities about leisure.

At times, however, even challenges that are well-matched to skills are perceived by some people with disabilities as being too great. Fear and trepidation may occur for people who have experienced limited success when attempting new activities. Helping them gain a realistic appraisal of the degree of challenge associated with an activity is important. For instance, participants can be encouraged to attempt relatively simpler activities (e.g., shooting free throws) before attempting relatively more difficult tasks (e.g., a game of basketball). While challenges which facilitate enjoyment often exceed skills slightly, assistance may be needed.
when participants lack confidence in the face of such challenges.

Development of the participant's ability to choose and successfully engage in recreation activities of sufficient scope and variety to experience enjoyment is an aspect of TR services. The more skills people master, the more likely it is that they will view an activity as presenting a challenge which is manageable. Therefore, participants can be encouraged to develop an array of recreation activity skills that contribute to meaningful leisure, enjoyment, and satisfaction.

As people succeed in an activity that is optimally challenging, they begin to feel competent, and their motivation to continue the activity is increased. Ultimately, success helps people see new challenges as attractive rather than intimidating. Having a variety of activities in which a person feels confident can enhance self-determination. Nevertheless, as Csikszentmihalyi (1990) noted, to achieve depth of enjoyment and flow, effort and concentration of attention are needed.

**Investment of Attention.** The number and intensity of environmental elements competing with the activity for the person's attention are important to consider when providing TR services (Ellis et al., 1983). Ellis and colleagues suggested that TR specialists “be very sensitive to novel aspects of the environment which might detract from focusing upon the particular activity in progress” (p. 13). Attention to a task and subsequent enjoyment can be enhanced when individuals learn to reduce distractions surrounding activities that bring them enjoyment, or when service providers reduce distractions to the extent possible. To reduce distractions, disruptive settings and people should be avoided; however, if distractions are present, participants can learn to minimize the impact of distractions by focusing attention and de-emphasizing the importance of external disruptions.

Among factors that undermine attention to a task are evaluation processes that direct an individual's attention on him or herself. To the extent possible, self-evaluations should be delayed until after an event, at which time positive attributions can be encouraged. Participants can be helped to reduce maladaptive attributions for success and failure, which interfere with the investment of attention and enjoyment associated with a situation. For example, participants can be helped to recognize that, in many situations, failure should be: (a) attributed to external factors (e.g., task difficulty) as opposed to internal ones (e.g., ability), (b) viewed as an unstable outcome (e.g., the result of effort) that is not expected to occur in each situation rather than expecting failure to be a stable outcome (e.g., ability), and (c) attributed to specific situations (e.g., failure with the expert ski slope attempted last week) as opposed to generalizing failure more globally (e.g., failure with all sports). In any case, however, such attribution retraining should only be done after the fact or when it is clear that maladaptive attributions have been disruptive of attention.

The model presented here is intended to be used holistically, because changes to one component of the model are likely to influence changes in another. Therefore, if a person seems to be experiencing difficulty in one area (e.g., investment of attention), the source of the problem may be found in another area (e.g., self-determination). In addition, what can be done to strengthen one component probably will have implications for another.

**Application of Model to TR Programming Process**

The TR programming process contains four steps: (a) assessment, (b) planning, (c) implementation, and (d) evaluation (O'Mor-Crow & Reynolds, 1989). Application of the proposed service model as it relates to the TR programming process results in further delineation of tasks completed by professionals.

**Assessment.** TR assessments help deter-
mine participants’ past leisure pursuits, current interests, and future aspirations. In addition, skills associated with making choices and decisions, expressing preferences, and setting goals are assessed. Participants are assessed relative to their ability to assess their leisure skills, appraise challenges associated with leisure pursuits, and make adaptations to activities so they can participate in leisure pursuits which have manageable challenges. Participants’ skills associated with reducing distractions, avoiding disruptive feedback, focusing on positive attributions, and increasing challenges as their skills increase are assessed to determine their ability to focus attention on a leisure pursuit. Initial assessments of enjoyment associated with leisure pursuits and functional skills are helpful when making comparisons to post-treatment status.

Planning. Because of the subjective nature of enjoyment and the importance of self-determination and intrinsic motivation to enjoyment, participants are encouraged to be involved in the selection and planning of activities. In the planning stage, capitalizing on strengths of participants and developing strategies that address their deficits are priorities. Objectives are established that encourage participants to learn ways to achieve enjoyment and create environments conducive to enjoyment.

Implementation. Activity opportunities are presented to participants from a range of options that facilitate enjoyment and have meaning outside of therapy sessions. It is helpful to communicate that activities in which participants are engaging during treatment are building toward something meaningful beyond the therapeutic setting (M. Csikszentmihalyi, personal communication, April 30, 1998). Positive feedback can result in self-awareness that may disrupt a person’s attention. Therefore, feedback is given at such times (e.g., not while attention is focused on an activity) and in such ways that participants learn to internalize standards of performance and eventually do not require external feed-

back. Participants can be encouraged to manipulate activity challenges to correspond with their changing skills.

The descriptions in the boxes depicted in Figure 2 identify actions that lead to enjoyment and ultimately to functional improvements. People who are self-directed move through components of the model. Nevertheless, for many people, it is necessary to provide supports and arrange environments so that these behaviors are more likely to occur (cf. Ellis, Witt, & Aguilar, 1983). Initially, TR specialists reduce distractions and prepare environments that are both challenging and an attractive opportunity for participants to become self-determined, be intrinsically motivated to engage in enjoyable activities, perceive challenges associated with leisure as being manageable, and invest their attention in a task that results in enjoyment. Ultimately, however, professionals work with people to move them to a point at which they are effective in creating environments which facilitate enjoyment.

Evaluation. When evaluating TR services, it is important to examine the degree to which participants are self-determined in their leisure, are motivated to participate in activities that bring them enjoyment, perceive that challenges associated with a variety of leisure activities are manageable, and can focus their attention while participating in specific activities. Because enjoyment can facilitate functional development, services can be evaluated by measuring participants’ functional improvements since initiation of TR services.

Strengths/Weaknesses/Limitations

We found that theories articulated by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Edward Deci, and their colleagues explain constructs relevant to TR. Since our model is tightly connected to existing theories associated with self-determination, intrinsic motivation, and enjoyment, the multitude of research studying these theories (cf. Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988;
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