

Theory Application in Therapeutic Recreation Practice and Research

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The purpose of this paper is to examine several selected theories and discuss how these theories may influence therapeutic recreation practice and research, using inclusive leisure services as an applied example. Contact theory, social construction theory, social identity theory, and ecological theory were selected based on their ability to enable generalizations and predict future events concerning physical, environmental, and social phenomena. Implications for inclusive leisure practice and research are discussed.

KEY WORDS: *Inclusive Leisure, Contact Theory, Social Construction Theory, Social Identity Theory, Ecological Theory, Therapeutic Recreation.*

Various psychology, sociology, and social psychology theories have contributed to the base of knowledge for therapeutic recreation (TR) practice and research. The application of theory to TR practice and research allows for the suggestion of relationships between phenomena so that outcomes can be generalized, understood, or explained. Yet, most TR prac-

tice and research is atheoretical, thus creating a gap in building outcomes-focused services and research (Shank, Coyle, Boyd, & Kinney, 1996).

“Theory ought to create the capacity to invent explanations” (Stinchcombe, 1968, p. 3). Henderson (1994) suggested that the aim of theory is to assist in describing and explaining

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observed relationships so inferences may be made about other relationships. TR practices and research that are based on processes and techniques derived from theories are beneficial to the field because they contribute to an understanding of reality (Austin, 1996; Malkin, 1993). In other words, theories guide TR professionals in determining what may be occurring in particular situations and what may occur in the future, if similar situations are replicated. In addition, theories enable generalizations to be made from direct experience in an effort to predict future events or behaviors, develop "best practices," and identify relevant future research (Tripp & Sherill, 1991). Ellis (1993) noted that a lack of theory in TR practices and research is a weakness because theory is critical for professional growth and quality services.

It is recommended that TR specialists should use theoretical perspectives as the framework for development of interventions, services, and research that result in outcomes or benefits for participants (Coyle, Kinney, & Shank, 1993). Dunn (1993) suggested that the validity of TR may be increased when practice and research are framed by and linked to theoretical foundations. The use of theoretical frameworks in TR practice and research contributes to increasing the body of knowledge, service accountability, and understanding of how TR relates to a variety of health and human services (Bedini & Wu, 1994; Shank et al., 1996). One area of TR where debate has taken place about the body of knowledge, service accountability, and understanding of the role of TR has been in the research and delivery of inclusive leisure services for people with disabilities (Hutchinson & McGill, 1992; Schleien, 1993).

Recently, the focus on including people with disabilities in residential, work, educational, and recreational environments with their peers without disabilities has increased (Devine, 1997; Oliver, 1996; Sable, 1995). Including people with disabilities in leisure experiences affords them with an opportunity to exercise their right to be a part of commu-

nity life, learn new and improve existing skills, develop friendships, and express self-determined behavior (Dattilo, 1994; Mahon & Bullock, 1992; Schleien, Meyer, Heyne, & Biel Brandt, 1995). The attainment of the inclusion of people with disabilities in leisure services is difficult given the physical, emotional, or cognitive limitations of individuals, as well as architectural, attitudinal, and programmatic barriers (Barnes, 1990). Designing and promoting inclusive leisure experiences involves the examination and possible modification of physical, environmental, and social aspects of services (Shank et al., 1996). The consideration of theories to offer a foundation for understanding and addressing issues of the physical, environmental, and social aspects of inclusive leisure practice and research may be helpful.

The purpose of this paper was to review selected theories and discuss how these theories may influence TR practice and research, using inclusive leisure services as an applied example. Inclusion of people with disabilities in leisure is a complex phenomena, involving physical, environmental, and social factors (Shank et al., 1996). Although studies on inclusive leisure have been grounded in theories such as self-determination (Devine, Malley, Sheldon, Dattilo, & Gast, 1997) and symbolic interactionism (Bedini & Henderson, 1994), it is the intent of this paper to expand the repertoire of potential theories that may be applied to the complex phenomenon of inclusion.

Understanding Theoretical Perspectives

The theories presented in the following section include contact theory (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Cook, 1962), social construction theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), social identity theory (Hewitt, 1991; Skevington & Baker, 1989), and ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Germain, 1991; Henggeler, 1982). These theories were selected based on their ability to enable generalizations and predict future events concerning psychological,

sociological, and environmental phenomena related to inclusion (Howe-Murphy & Charboneau, 1987; O'Brien, 1987; Sable, 1995). Although a variety of theories were considered for review, these theories had previously been applied in examinations of inclusive contexts (see Devine, 1997; Hewitt, 1991; Munson, 1991; Sable, 1995; Schleien, Hornfeldt, & McAvoy, 1994; Tripp, French, & Sherrill, 1995), thus providing examples of theory applications. In addition, theories were chosen based on their potential to inform a wide scope of inclusive leisure situations.

Contact Theory

Contact theory asserts that interaction between people with differences tends to influence changes in attitudes toward one another (Allport, 1954; Tripp & Sherrill, 1991; Tripp et al., 1995). Specifically, the theory postulates that prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination may be reduced by equal status contact and a focus on common interests and goals (Allport, 1954). Contact intended to change one group's perceptions or attitudes concerning individuals of another group is described as a situation in which expectations about group members are altered or confirmed by reality (Roper, 1990a). For example, Archie and Sherrill (1989) compared the attitudes of fifth- and sixth-grade students in mainstreamed physical education classes with fifth- and sixth-grade students in nonmainstreamed physical education classes. They found that students in the mainstreamed classes identified their peers with disabilities as more fun and interesting than students in the nonmainstreamed classes.

Expectations or attitude changes, however, may take various directions. The path of the change depends primarily on the conditions under which contact has taken place. For example, Allport (1954) suggested that favorable conditions tend to improve attitudes, whereas unfavorable conditions tend to foster harmful attitudes; contact itself is not enough to result in positive attitude changes. Contact also can be a source of embarrassment, irritation, and

escalation of conflict (Amir, 1969; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961; Wilhite, Devine, & Goldenberg, 1999). According to Roper (1990a), the nature of the contact and experiences that occur determine its success or failure. Minimal or infrequent contact tends to reinforce negative perceptions people with and without disabilities have about each other (Allport, 1954). Favorable conditions that tend to foster positive attitude changes involve contacts that (a) produce equal status, as well as promote contact; (b) are mutually rewarding to those with and without disabilities; (c) are personal rather than causal, allowing individuals to get to know each other well; (d) persist over time; (e) focus on establishing common rather than individual goals; and (f) receive strong support from relevant authorities (Allport, 1935, 1954; Cook 1962; Tripp et al., 1995).

On the other hand, contact also may lead to unfavorable attitudes. Roper (1990b) examined the underlying assumptions of favorable contact situations in his study of Special Olympics volunteers' perceptions of people with mental retardation. He reported that certain practices involved with Special Olympics reinforced existing negative stereotypes concerning people with mental retardation (e.g., dependent, demanding), and did not provide optimum conditions for positive change in beliefs and perceptions. Roper concluded that if insufficient attention is given to the various components of the contact situation (e.g., need for equal status situations, value of cooperative interdependence, opportunity to disprove stereotype), positive change will not be produced. Unfavorable attitudes tend to occur when (a) contact produces competition between groups and/or for scarce resources; (b) the environment is unpleasant, involuntary, or has an air of tension; (c) group members are in a state of frustration; and (d) groups have standards (e.g., moral or cultural) that are objectionable to each other (Cook, 1988; Tripp et al., 1995).

In another example of how contact situations at the individual- and societal-levels may

lead to negative perceptions, Tripp and her colleagues (1995) concluded that when competition is not modified to be equitable for all students, negative attitudes toward peers with disabilities may result. In addition, Tripp et al. reported a preference of one disability type over another (i.e., students with behavioral disabilities were viewed more favorably than those with physical or learning disabilities). They concluded that it is possible that society does not portray different disabilities in the same light, resulting in contact not supported by societal and institutional norms, and therefore, is not likely to result in positive attitude formation. Thus, the theory postulates that, if people with and without disabilities have favorable contact with one another during leisure participation, they will have a more positive attitude toward each other than those who have unfavorable or no contact.

The philosophy of inclusive leisure assumes that people with disabilities are welcomed to participate and accommodated in leisure programs alongside their peers without disabilities (Dattilo, 1994; Kaufman-Broida, 1995). Applying contact theory to the inclusion of people with disabilities in leisure settings may provide a greater understanding of why these experiences are perceived as successful or not, and how best to facilitate mutually beneficial inclusive leisure experiences.

The following excerpts were taken from a study by Wihite et al. (1999). They illustrate how lack of, superficial, or unequal contact, as well as contact involving competitive situations may inadvertently confirm negative perceptions of people with disabilities. "Brandy," a 14 year old female without a disability, described an experience she had when a student who used a wheelchair was included in her physical education class. The class was playing a physically active sport and no modifications to include the student with the disability had been implemented. When the student with the disability attempted to participate in the sport, he had a difficult time and was not successful. Brandy reflected on his participation, "He probably needed to play

with someone on his level cause it wouldn't be fair for him to play with the people who aren't disabled cause they'd be better than him [in the sport]." In subsequent classes, the student with the disability did not actively participate with his peers without disabilities but instead did things such as keep score, manage the equipment, or bounce a ball by himself. Brandy expressed that she "felt real bad for that boy 'cause he was just off to the side." Brandy felt that inclusive leisure participation was acceptable if the activities were not physically active, but were of a more passive nature instead. She stated that it was "ok to work on school projects and participate in passive activities with the disabled students but it's not fair to them to play sports together. If they are going to do something [competitive] then it should be on their level." In addition to contact that produced unequal status, Brandy described the lack of personal contact she and her peers without disabilities had with the students with disabilities, "During assemblies they [students with disabilities] have special seating and are in the back by themselves, at lunch they eat an hour before us, and they never participate in assemblies or get awards like others." She felt that her perception on inclusion was due primarily to lack of contact with people with disabilities and concluded by stating, "It's not that we [students without disabilities] don't welcome them, it's just that we don't have any contact with them [students with disabilities]."

"Page," a 14 year old female with a disability, said that someone who did not know her may describe her as "a poor little girl who is in a wheelchair." If someone knew her, however, they would describe her as "energetic, positive, poised, confident, and happy." Page suggested that the difference in perceptions was due to whether people had casual or personal contact with her. She felt that the more people without disabilities had contact with her, got to know her and all she was involved in, the greater the chance that they would not think of her as a "poor little disabled person that gets around in a wheelchair and

has no life.” Page expressed frustration with contact that was not mutually rewarding to those with and without disabilities stating, “I don’t understand how people can think that doing things for me out of pity is helping me. I get nothing out of that and they get everything.”

Situations that do not focus on establishing common goals also can contribute to negative attitudes toward people with disabilities. Page offered the following analogy that exemplifies the importance of the existence of a common goal rather than an individual goal:

It’s like when we all go to baseball games. It’s a community thing, a group thing that we all do together and we all have our own ways of cheering and enjoying the game. But when we don’t try to understand the different ways we go about cheering, we’re not going to learn something about all the different ways we can enjoy the game. We are all trying to do the same thing, have the same thing in common, to enjoy the game. But if we think there’s only one way to enjoy the game then we not going to learn anything different.

Social Construction Theory

Social construction theory seeks to explain the process by which knowledge is created and assumed as reality. This theory asserts that if people construct meaning through social interactions, then their behaviors, objects, and language will reflect that meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). For example, if people associate the use of a wheelchair to mean “independence” then the behaviors toward, objects used in relation to, and language about the wheelchair will reflect “independence.”

According to social construction theory, reality is constructed through a complex process of social interactions between people. In the ongoing process of social interaction, people strive to create a shared social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Robertson,

1977). Reality construction involves a continual and collective creation and association of meaning with behavior, objects, and language. Within the context of a shared social reality, people act in consistent and predictable patterns based on meaning ascribed to behaviors, objects, and language (Douglas, 1970). In addition, the social construction of reality is context specific where the meaning of behavior, objects, and language may change if the situation changes.

According to Roth (1983), disability is a socially constructed phenomenon. The social construction of disability refers to the meaning ascribed by society to physical, mental, cognitive, and emotional impairments (Oliver, 1996). From the perspective of social construction theory, the meaning of disability changes as the context changes. While in certain contexts disability may have a positive meaning, in most contexts disability has been associated with a negative meaning (Bogdan & Taylor, 1992). Hahn (1988) suggested that society has constructed prescribed standards of physical attractiveness, functional capabilities, and functional independence. People with disabilities are perceived as not being able to meet these standards thus, the result is a lower social status. For people with disabilities, this low social status means that they are perceived as not being capable of functioning as independently, accomplishing as much, or having relationships that are as reciprocal as people without disabilities (Safilios-Rothschild, 1976). By not meeting a prescribed set of standards, people with disabilities are assumed to hold an inferior and disadvantaged status in society (Taylor & Bogdan, 1993).

Social construction theory asserts that society’s response to people with disabilities has been constructed as a negative response to behavioral differences between people with and without disabilities (Higgins, 1992). The negative response by society toward people with disabilities may be seen in behaviors toward people with disabilities (e.g., offering only segregated leisure opportunities), objects used by either group in relation to people with

disabilities (e.g., age-inappropriate recreation equipment used with adults with mental retardation), and language about people with disabilities (e.g., referring to people with disabilities as a category such as “the blind”). The social construction of disability evokes negative feelings and responses toward people with disabilities which in turn lessens opportunities for inclusion (Higgins). West (1984) reported that feeling stigmatized inhibited people with disabilities from participating in community leisure activities because they did not feel socially accepted by people without disabilities. According to Henderson, Bedini, and Hecht (1994), leisure participation of women with disabilities was negatively impacted when the recreations of others without disabilities reflected negative responses toward them. Devine (1997) found a positive relationship between perceptions of social acceptance, leisure frequency, and leisure satisfaction of females with disabilities, as well as with individuals with mobility impairments. Oliver (1996) suggested that the social construction of disability creates a social barrier to inclusion in community life for people with disabilities by generalizing negative notions of disabling conditions. The application of social construction theory to inclusive leisure participation suggests that, if society associates a negative meaning with disability, then behaviors, objects, and language related to people with disabilities will reflect a negative meaning and inclusion in leisure services may be diminished (Devine; Taylor & Bogdan, 1993; West).

Social construction theory is illustrated in the following examples. Studying the perceptions of youth with and without disabilities about inclusion in leisure activities, Wilhite et al. (1999) reported evidence of the social construction of disability. These researchers found that students with and without disabilities ascribed meanings to objects used by people with disabilities and speculated on the influence these objects may have on inclusion in leisure. For example, when asked to describe his typical day, “Jeff,” a 14 year old male with

a disability, mentioned that he rode “. . . to school on the ‘little bus’, you know, it’s one of those special ed things.” The meaning he ascribed to the “little bus” suggested that it was an object that negatively distinguished him from his peers in that the only students riding the “little bus” were students with disabilities. Wilhite and colleagues speculated that when negative meanings are associated with objects used by people with disabilities in inclusive leisure settings, such as adapted recreation equipment, these meanings may become barriers to participation.

West (1984) applied components of social construction theory to examine social barriers (i.e., stigma) to inclusive leisure participation for people with disabilities. He described how (a) social stigmas are perceived by people with disabilities, (b) people with disabilities react and adapt to social stigmas, and (c) negative attitudes or reactions by people without disabilities restrict the recreation participation of people with disabilities. West found that people with disabilities were less likely to participate in community recreation programs if stigmatizing attitudes were present. Specifically, West reported that people with disabilities intended to reduce leisure participation if they detected stigmatizing attitudes from people without disabilities.

A study that addressed barriers to inclusive leisure from the perspective of women with disabilities was conducted by Bedini and Henderson (1994). While this study did not directly apply social construction theory, it offered an example of this theory in relation to inclusive leisure participation. Bedini and Henderson studied meaning in relation to its influence on the inclusive leisure participation and satisfaction of women with disabilities. The women reported negative meanings of disability and related these meanings to their participation and satisfaction in leisure. For example, the women perceived that others had decreased expectations in relation to their abilities and as a result, they were treated in a less equal manner than those without disabilities. Bedini and Henderson ascertained from the

participants that a negative meaning associated with people with disabilities translated into a lack of physical access, social and psychological comfort, and participation opportunities for these women. The authors found that negative experiences from society affected the women's attitude toward being in public, pursuing participation in leisure activities, and experiencing satisfaction from community and inclusive leisure activities. The research participants indicated that stigmas and a culture of segregation negatively influenced their satisfaction in leisure activities with their peers without disabilities.

Social Identity Theory

According to Skevington and Baker (1989), social identity theory refers to how people identify themselves based on their likeness or sameness to others. Social identity relates to one's identification or affiliations with others based on group or community memberships and focuses on those aspects of identity that are derived from group membership. In other words, if we belong to a certain group, our social behavior and personalities will be influenced by membership in this group (Festinger, 1954; Henslin, 1996). Mead (1934) referred to social identity as the "me," the socialized self that is conscious of social norms, beliefs, expectations, and individual responsibilities.

The development of social identity is important because it provides a person with a sense of belonging; we identify who we are as a person by our affiliation with certain groups or community memberships (Hewitt, 1991). In addition, the development of a social identity is a critical component in the formation of the self because social identity brings order to the various roles individuals play in society. According to Henslin (1996), the development of one's social identity is a result of socialization and social interaction rather than something inherent in a person. Mead (1934) asserted that the formation of the "me" or social identity occurs through the process of social interaction; individuals anticipate what others expect,

then evaluate and control their behavior accordingly. For instance, social identity theory assumes that the more members in groups adjust their behavior to model the norms, values, and beliefs of other members, the more similar they will likely be in thought and action.

Society also contributes to the shaping of the individual's social identity through assignment of social status. Social status refers to one's socially defined position in society (Robertson, 1977). Social positions are created by the way in which society compares individuals to the majority group, ranks the differences, and assigns a lower or higher social ranking based on the positive or negative comparison of differences (Robertson; Safilios-Rothschild, 1976; Skevington & Baker, 1989). The status of people with disabilities is determined by comparing them with people without disabilities. People without disabilities are considered by society to be more powerful, attractive, independent, and capable than people with disabilities (Safilios-Rothschild; Higgins, 1992). Thus, the social identity and status of having a disability historically is associated with negative characteristics and an inferior status.

Consideration of social identity theory in relation to inclusive leisure services concerns the social status and sense of belonging of individuals with disabilities in leisure contexts. People with disabilities have fewer opportunities to be involved in group social interaction with people without disabilities, thus have fewer opportunities to contribute to or experience group norms, values, beliefs, behaviors, and a shared social reality (Albrecht, 1976; Higgins, 1992). As a result, people with disabilities are more susceptible to experiencing social constraints and being stereotyped; thus, they have fewer opportunities to exhibit their similarities to people without disabilities (Albrecht). The application of social identity theory to inclusive leisure participation suggests that if people with disabilities do not belong to or interact in groups with people without disabilities, they may feel a dimin-

ished sense of belonging, limited social skill development, and devalued social status (Henslin, 1996).

Brock and Kleiber (1994) illustrated social identity theory in their study on career-ending injuries of elite college athletes. The purpose of this study was to examine elite college athletes whose identities had been shaped around their performance in an intercollegiate sport and had experienced career-ending injuries. Social identity theory was apparent in the discussions by the athletes about their feeling like they were "socially invisible" or no longer belonged to the privileged athlete group. Specifically, because they no longer were members of the athlete group, they felt that they were lacking a sense of belonging, an awareness of behaviors that were important to exhibit, and an understanding of the role they played in society. For example, "Sharon" stated, "When ever someone asked me 'what sorority are you in?' it was always easy for me to say 'oh, I'm an athlete.' Now it's hard for me to say I'm an athlete because I'm not really an athlete anymore . . . it's something I don't have." In regard to social identity and status of the athletes, the authors found that the athletes expressed a loss of social privilege and acquisition of a socially devalued status as a result of experiencing a career-ending injury. "Mike" stated that, "All of the sudden you're standing on the outside looking in . . . I felt like people were looking at me differently, like I was something less than I was before [the injury]. That special quality I had before [the injury] was gone." Brock and Kleiber recommended that the health care industry consider the whole person, including the person's sense of belonging and self, when designing therapeutic services.

The contribution of social status to social identity is evidenced in the perceptions of youth with and without disabilities (Wilhite et al., 1999). Wilhite and colleagues reported a demonstration of social status in regard to identity by the youth with disabilities in how they perceived others with disabilities different from their own. Specifically, youth with

disabilities demonstrated a hierarchy of social status within the social identity of disability. This hierarchy appeared to take the form of a "pecking order" (e.g., having one type of disability was preferable to another) within disability status. Molly said, "There are people at my school who think I'm retarded which is very weird for me, you know. I think they think that because I help Mrs. X with her retarded kids, like I'm a peer tutor. But I just go to help 'cause then it helps to know that there are more people in the world that have worse problems than me." Molly and Jeff expressed relief about having a physical disability. Jeff stated ". . . well at least I'm not, you know, mental or something, I can understand things and stuff."

Ecological Theory

Ecological theory is based on the concept of systems where an interconnection between people and their environment exists (Howe-Murphy & Charboneau, 1987). A system is defined as a network of components directly or indirectly related in a causal manner (Howe-Murphy & Charboneau). Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that an individual is nested in a complex web of interconnected systems where each system and each component within a system is related to the other. Ecological theory asserts that if individuals exist within systems, there is a reciprocal influence of individuals on systems and systems on individuals (Rothman, 1994). That is, transactions between individuals and their environment shape and change each other. According to Anderson (1994), the ecological theory also advocates viewing people in terms of how they interact with their subculture, surroundings, and significant people within their environment.

The structure provided by ecological theory recognizes the complexity and intricacy of relationships among individuals and their environments that make up a social system. In providing a structure for analyzing concepts and transactions, the ecological theory operates under four fundamental assumptions. These include the following: (a) building rela-

tionships between people that are based on mutual respect and reciprocity, authenticity, and openness that enables maximal growth and interdependence; (b) recognizing the total person, including that person's abilities, limitations, interests, needs, and environment, creating a focal point for addressing needs and providing services; (c) viewing problems, limitations, deficits, boundaries, and constraints as the result of a multitude of variables rather than a single causal factor minimizing the effects of individual limitations; and (d) designing environments to be least restrictive and provide maximum support empowering people to attain optimal interdependence within a specific setting (Munson, 1991).

The organization perspective includes the identification, arrangement, and interdependencies of parts or components that comprise a whole or system (Howe-Murphy & Charbonneau, 1987). Thus, if an individual's behavior is the primary concern, that person's inner characteristics (physical, social, intellectual, spiritual, psychological) must be considered as well as his or her interaction as part of a family, neighborhood, community, social group, and peer network. Munson (1991) and McCready (1997) advised that an ecological approach may be best suited to meet the needs of at-risk youth. As Munson suggested, the failure of intervention efforts to produce desirable long-term behavior changes may be because TR professionals have not tried to understand the needs of at-risk youth within the context of their social and physical environment.

Ecological theory, when applied to inclusive leisure services, concerns the interaction between the individual's physical, emotional, cognitive, or mental needs and the system within which the individual functions. As Schleien, Ray, and Green (1997) discussed, mere physical inclusion of people with and without disabilities in leisure activities does not assure an increase in the social acceptance of people with disabilities; individuals, as well as their environment, must be adequately prepared to elicit the benefits of inclusion for

people with and without disabilities. When an imbalance between people and their environment exists, adaptations (which may include withdrawal from the environment) and coping occur so that opportunities for growth and interdependence may be maximized (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Germain, 1991). To optimize acceptance and to promote human development, people search for the best "fit" between their self-perceptions and environment (Bronfenbrenner; Germain). Goto (1997) described attempts by Chinese American high school students to blend in with their peers. The Chinese students, who described themselves as "normal," did not want to be perceived as being different. Their efforts to be accepted included distancing themselves from aspects of Chinese culture. While they sought a philosophical "middle ground," they also wanted the mobility of moving back and forth within a subculture of various students (e.g., whites, African Americans, Asians). As Germain pointed out, however, if person-environment relationships remain unequal, or if extraordinary efforts are required to "fit" in the environment, then these relationships and environments ultimately deteriorate.

Sable (1995) found that inclusive leisure programs designed to address the physical and social needs of all participants, as well as the social environment of the program, reduced the prevalence of the formation of dichotomous relationships between people with and without disabilities. For example, when the needs of the person (abilities, transportation or personal assistance needs) and their environment (accessibility of facilities, level of social acceptance by people without disabilities) were considered in the design and implementation of leisure services, opportunities for the development of equal status relationships between people with and without disabilities were increased (Rothman, 1994; Sable, 1992).

In their study on self-perceptions of youth with and without disabilities, Wilhite and colleagues (1999) noted situations that could best be explained through the application of ecological theory. Molly and Reggie provide an

example of the interdependencies between people and their environment. Molly expressed that she could not be as spontaneous when participating in leisure activities or spending time with her friends as her siblings and peers without disabilities because she was constrained by transportation limitations. Her dependency on family members to transport her provides an example of the interdependencies between people and their environment. She stated, "When I have to go somewhere I have to ask my mom and dad way in advance because my mom, she hates to drive the big van. We don't have hook-ups in the other van for my chair and mom hates to drive the big van and I don't blame her. And you know I just can't hop in a car and go someplace because my wheelchair is big and heavy. So it takes planning ahead." In relation to physical accessibility, Reggie stated, "Sometimes you know, I have to go way around back to get into someplace and it takes more effort. I'm pretty strong, but I know there are other people who are disabled who aren't as strong as me and it takes a lot out of you when you have to wheel so far to get into some place."

Howe-Murphy and Charboneau (1987) discussed the importance of including social interaction communication skill when applying ecological theory. David provides an example of how ecological theory may be applied to increase positive and mutual communication with his peers. David stated that he thought he had limited opportunities to interact with people without disabilities but he "tried to go out of his way to meet people." After describing his segregated classroom environment where he primarily interacts with peers with disabilities, David was asked if he had much of an opportunity to meet peers without disabilities. David said, "Well yeah, I try to go out in the hall every time the bell rings and meet people." David went on to describe how he wheels into the hallway during the few minutes between classes and sits against the wall and watches people go by. After the bell rings, indicating classes are to begin, he wheels back

into the classroom and resumes class with his peers with disabilities.

Applying Theoretical Perspectives

Theories presented in this article are by no means exhaustive, but may provide a foundation for understanding and implementing inclusive leisure services. Theory will be most useful to TR specialists when it is articulated and operationalized as answers that are sought to specific issues, such as inclusive leisure services (Henderson, 1994).

Implications for Practice

The effectiveness of inclusive leisure services is increased when practices are linked to theoretical foundations. The application of theory to inclusive leisure services will assist TR specialists in developing "best practices" to deliver services by making generalizations from experiences and predicting future results.

Contact theory assists the TR specialist in the creation of environments that foster equal status, are mutually rewarding, facilitate frequent personal contact, and emphasize common goals. One of the guiding principles of inclusive leisure is the creation of an environment which supports people interacting in an interdependent manner. Contact theory asserts that environments designed to foster positive contact, result in positive attitudes between people with and without disabilities. TR specialists could provide structured rather than unstructured leisure opportunities in which people with and without disabilities participate together. TR specialists could facilitate a structured recreation activity so that contact between people with and without disabilities could be frequent, personal, and emphasize common goals. For example, Page's analogy of the different ways to enjoy a baseball game furthers an understanding of the importance of focusing on a common goal. When emphasis is placed on a common goal, rather than uniformity in action to achieve a common goal, then contact may lead to positive changes in the attitudes of people without disabilities to-

ward people with disabilities. Designing TR services, particularly inclusive leisure services, based on contact theory may result in improved relations between people with and without disabilities (Tripp & Sherrill, 1991). For instance, a TR specialist could design a recreation activity so Brandy's contact with her peers with disabilities was personal rather than distant, frequent rather than occasional, and structured to focus on common goals rather than differences.

Social construction theory asserts that meaning is constructed, in that all people interact based on constructed meanings. Interactions between people reflect consequences of meaning through behaviors exhibited, language expressed, and objects created and used (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The consequences of a negatively constructed meaning of people with disabilities, in a leisure context, are negative attitudes toward modification of leisure programs, resistance to the elimination of physical barriers, and few opportunities for inclusion in leisure services. Sable (1995) advocated for preparation of the social environment to increase acceptance of people with disabilities in inclusive leisure settings. For example, general leisure service professionals could receive special training on sensitive terminology and be encouraged to use this terminology when facilitating inclusive activities. Special attention may need to be given to the social context of the leisure environment to foster social acceptance between people with and without disabilities (Devine, 1997). Social construction theory offers a foundation for TR specialists to provide opportunities to design the social environment for people with disabilities to dispel myths and counter stereotypes about living with a disability. For example, TR specialists, together with other leisure professionals and people with disabilities, could design leisure programs that provide opportunities for people with disabilities to exhibit their leisure talents. TR specialists may also act as change agents in challenging socially created knowledge about people with disabilities by conducting leisure education classes that teach

people with disabilities to self-advocate for inclusion in leisure services (Bedini & Henderson, 1994). When acting as a change agent, TR specialists may consider modeling behavior that conveys a message of respect and dignity for people with disabilities. For example, by including people with disabilities on advisory counsels, planning committees, or boards, TR specialists can send a message of respect for the input of people with disabilities. The hope is that, through social interaction, the meaning of disability will be changed from a negative to a positive one. Language is another area influenced by social construction of disability. Using person first terminology when addressing and referring to people with disabilities may be an effective way to apply social construction theory when planning and implementing inclusive leisure services (Datilo & Smith, 1990).

Social identity theory asserts that membership in a group or community contributes to one's sense of identity and commonalities with others. Most individuals see themselves as being similar to, as well as different from, each other. Social identity theory provides a foundation for explaining the different roles people can play in leisure contexts and predicting how those roles shape the person's sense of identity and belonging (Hewitt, 1991). Using social identity theory as a foundation, inclusive leisure settings could be designed to provide opportunities for people with and without disabilities to discover similarities, such as common interests, about each other. In the discovery of similarities, people may develop a sense of belonging and increase their involvement in community life. Brock and Kleiber (1994) recommended that attention be given to one's social identity to promote a valued sense of one's self. Molly's narrative provided an example of social identity theory in relation to status. In consideration of an individual's social identity and status, a TR specialist may design leisure services that focus on individual abilities and contributions of all people so as not to promote a privileged level of ability, or "pecking order." For those individuals who are

new to inclusive leisure services, the application of social identity theory may ease the transition from segregated to inclusive leisure services by creating a social environment that focuses on cooperation and interdependence. Specifically, a TR specialist could implement a program that focused on similarities between participants, such as tennis skills, to foster a sense of belonging and facilitate the discovery of common interests.

Ecological theory involves the assessment of interactions between the individuals with disabilities and their environment and programming based on that assessment (Munson, 1991). Ecological theory provides the basis for TR practitioners to explain the physical, social, community, family, institutional, and personal environments to predict obstacles to inclusion in leisure programs (Howe-Murphy & Charboneau, 1987). By looking at the "big picture" to determine where obstacles may exist, a practitioner may be able to consider multiple methods to address barriers to inclusion. Ecological theory has the potential to provide the basis to address various factors that cause and maintain a lack of inclusion of people with disabilities in community life (Munson). One such factor is the extent to which TR specialists, and other recreation and leisure professionals as relevant authority figures, have control over creating and promoting supportive inclusive leisure environments (Schleien, Germ, & McAvoy, 1996; Smith & Goc Karp, 1996). For example, the TR specialist may assume the role of ecological change agent by focusing on dysfunctional systems (e.g., prejudice, stigma, architectural barriers) that create the barriers to inclusion of people with disabilities in leisure activities. Involving people with disabilities and their family members in on-going program planning and evaluation, as well as the development of participation strategies, is one way practitioners could apply ecological theory. In the case of David, a TR specialist may include David and his peers in planning and evaluating a recreation activity to facilitate social interaction between people with and without disabili-

ties so interaction is not occasional, distant, and nonreciprocal.

Implications for Research

Ellis (1993) identified the lack of theory in TR research as an obstacle to advancing the TR profession and recommended that theory be used to guide future studies. Research that is not based on theory falls short in accounting for complex leisure phenomena (Henderson, 1994). Bedini and Wu (1994) recommended grounding research in theory to establish efficacy and increase the body of knowledge in TR.

Future research grounded in contact theory should examine attitudes toward people with disability when leisure services are designed to foster equal status, be mutually rewarding, encourage personal contact, be consistent over time, and focus on common goals. Instead of trying to determine if inclusive leisure services reduce prejudice and promote acceptance, more appropriate research questions, as Cook (1962) suggested, may pertain to the types of contact situations and experiences which will result in positive attitude change. Thus, emphasis should be placed on the change in attitudes of people without disabilities given the nature of the contact between people with and without disabilities. For example, Wilhite and colleagues (1999) suggested that future studies exploring inclusion issues examine the affect of inclusive participation on the development of equal status relationships between youth with and without disabilities. Contact theory may provide a useful base from which to study these and other inclusive leisure phenomena. In addition, contact theory may provide a framework for researchers to investigate how majority and minority groups negotiate and agree upon acceptable accommodations in people and environments, and the extent to which TR specialists can positively facilitate and influence this process.

Social construction theory, as applied to people with disabilities, has informed researchers as to the meaning and consequence of having a disability. Future research should

focus on assumptions made by people without disabilities (e.g., participants and leisure services professionals) about the ability of people with disabilities to participate in leisure services. In particular, studies could examine the influence of assumptions made about the functional capabilities of people with disabilities on the opportunities for people with disabilities to be included in leisure services. Bogdan and Taylor (1989) suggested that negative images of people with disabilities are a result of how people without disabilities define "disability." An examination of how people without disabilities define people with disabilities in a leisure context could be conducted to determine ways in which leisure education programs might contribute to changing society's definition of disability. Studies that apply social construction theory could also focus on the relationship between negative meanings of disabilities (e.g., stereotypes, stigmas) and the influence of negative meaning on inclusive leisure participation from the perspective of people with disabilities.

Social identity theory operates under the assumption that to experience a sense of belonging to a group, people will conform to pressures to act, think, and feel the same way (Hewitt, 1991). Studies grounded in social identity theory should look at the ways in which the attitudes and behaviors of people without disabilities (e.g., participants and leisure service professionals) influence the acceptance of people with disabilities in inclusive leisure services. Specifically, if a leader of a leisure program exhibits behavior that reflects a negative attitude toward participants with disabilities, will other participants exhibit similar behavior? In addition, the application of social identity theory in inclusive leisure research could assist in the examination of the relationship between sense of belonging and leisure satisfaction of people with disabilities when participating in inclusive leisure activities. In a recent study on barriers encountered and inclusive practices employed by community leisure service agencies, Schleien et al. (1996) recommended future research examine

the roles of participants with and without disabilities and the influence of those roles on successful accommodations in inclusive leisure services. Social identity theory may "create the capacity to invent explanations" (Stinchcombe, 1968, p. 3) regarding this phenomenon. For example, an examination grounded in social identity theory could examine whether roles people play in inclusive leisure contexts contribute to or impede the development of a sense of belonging.

Future research employing ecological theory should examine the affective and conceptual meanings assigned to particular inclusive leisure settings by both people with and without disabilities (Munson, 1991). For example, emphasis could be placed on understanding how perceptions, feelings, and behaviors of people with and without disabilities change as a result of their interaction in leisure environments. To accomplish this, more research featuring first-hand knowledge from participants with and without disabilities about what constitutes successful inclusive leisure environments is needed (Germain, 1991; Wilhite et al., 1999). Ironically, research in the TR field has often excluded the voices of people with disabilities when investigating successful inclusion efforts (Wilhite et al.) The focus of studies grounded in ecological theory should be to change previous patterns of interaction of all people to enable people with and without disabilities to find a "better fit" within inclusive leisure environments (Howe-Murphy & Charboneau, 1987). The application of the ecological theory could also focus on examining the system (e.g., policies, architectural designs, program practices) under which inclusive leisure services are being provided to inquire as to whether leisure environments are designed in the least restrictive manner and encourage optimal independence and interdependence.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to assist in the understanding of several selected theories and the potential influence of these theories on

TR practice and research. Each theory was applied in the context of inclusionary leisure services for people with disabilities to build a better foundation for practice. While each theory offers its unique contribution, they also share commonalities that serve to support inclusion.

Contact theory informs TR in that it allows for an examination of the nature of contact between people with and without disabilities in relation to their attitudes toward each other. This theory informs inclusive leisure contexts by offering a foundation from which to scrutinize the quality of contact between people with and without disabilities. Similarities between contact and ecological theory can also be drawn by applying both theories to examine the degree to which people with and without disabilities experience equal status, personal contact, and mutual rewards in family, work, and community systems. Social construction and contact theories share commonalities when the meanings of behaviors, objects, and language about people with disabilities are examined in relation to the attitudes between people with and without disabilities in inclusive settings.

TR services are informed by social construction theory in that it assists in examining whether negative meanings associated with people with disabilities are perpetuated. In addition, this theory may inform us as to how negative meanings of people with disabilities are negotiated in an inclusive leisure context. Social construction and social identity theories together contribute to providing insight to inclusive leisure contexts when the meaning of behaviors, objects, and language are examined to determine whether or not they contribute to people developing a sense of belonging.

Social identity theory informs inclusive leisure in that it emphasizes the importance of achieving a sense of belonging in the formation of one's identity. The application of social identity theory in an inclusive leisure context may help people with and without disabilities discover commonalities, thus contributing to their sense of belonging. Social identity and

contact theories can relate to each other in situations where the quality of contact between people with and without disabilities could influence their sense of belonging. Similarities drawn between social identity and ecological theories can better inform inclusive leisure by applying them to determine commonalities between people with disabilities that would assist in bridging barriers in work, school, and neighborhood environments.

Ecological theory enlightens inclusive leisure contexts in that it allows for consideration of the person and the system in which he or she functions. In an inclusive leisure context, ecological theory informs TR professionals to consider not only individuals with and without disabilities but the overall attitudes of the community toward people with disabilities and inclusion of people with disabilities in community activities. Drawing similarities between ecological and social construction theories, inclusive leisure contexts can be better informed when the meaning of behaviors, objects, and language related to people with disabilities are examined in relation to family, community, and societal systems.

Inclusive leisure practice and research conducted using these theoretical frameworks can serve to explain and predict psychological, social, and environmental phenomena, phenomena which TR specialists are encouraged to address (Godbey & Robinson, 1997; Shank et al., 1996). Applying theory in TR may allow practitioners and researchers to assess the design of inclusive leisure programs, address society's response to disability, examine the level of belongingness experienced, and evaluate the system in which people may interact. Grounding TR practices and research in theory strengthens the possibility of improved leisure functioning, quality of life, access to leisure opportunities, and right to leisure for people with disabilities (Sylvester, 1992).

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