Flourishing Through Leisure and the Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change

Lynn S. Anderson
Linda A. Heyne

Abstract: This article explores the strengths approach in therapeutic recreation practice, as articulated through the Flourishing through Leisure Model: An Ecological Extension of the Leisure and Well-Being Model (Anderson & Heyne, 2012a, 2012b), and examines the Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change (Fredrickson, 2015) as an explanatory framework for why and how leisure can drive sustained positive lifestyle change. Overviews are provided of the strengths approach and the Flourishing through Leisure Model, emphasizing the central role leisure plays in strengths-based therapeutic recreation practice. The broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2013b) is explained as it is the basis for the Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change. The Upward Spiral theory is described in detail in the contexts of the neuroscience of enjoyment, passion (obsessive and harmonious), and prioritizing positivity. Practical applications of the Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change to strengths-based therapeutic recreation practice are drawn, as well as recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Strengths-based practice, theory, therapeutic recreation, recreation therapy, well-being, ecological approach, upward spiral theory of lifestyle change, flourishing through leisure, passion

Lynn S. Anderson is a distinguished service professor and director of the Inclusive Recreation Resource Center at the State University of New York in Cortland. Linda A. Heyne is a professor at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York. Please send correspondence to Lynn S. Anderson, lynn.anderson@cortland.edu.
Leisure is a source of well-being for many people and a powerful force for positive change in a person's life (Anderson & Heyne, 2012a; Caldwell, 2005; Carruthers & Hood, 2004). Leisure offers diverse choices for participation in activities that evoke enjoyment, including arts and culture, hobbies, sports, socializing, volunteering, and nature-based activities, among many others. Through leisure, people experience positive emotions, which link directly to health and well-being (Fredrickson, 2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2015). Leisure can fulfill creative-expressive needs and help people derive purpose and meaning in their lives, which can lead to personal development and self-determination. Leisure also provides opportunities for social relationships, a key contributor to happiness (Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Seligman, 2002, 2011).

Given the inherent value of the leisure experience to benefit the well-being of individuals, the Leisure and Well-Being Model (Carruthers & Hood, 2007; Hood & Carruthers, 2007) and, later, the Flourishing through Leisure Model: An Ecological Extension of the Leisure and Well-Being Model (Anderson & Heyne, 2012a; Anderson & Heyne, 2012b; Heyne & Anderson, 2012) were developed to provide guidance to therapeutic recreation practice, using leisure as the basis of that practice. Both models are based on the premise that leisure can drive positive lifestyle change and help people reach their goals for well-being.

Despite widespread belief that leisure is therapeutic, however, a sound coherent theory that explains the relationship between recreation and well-being has been lacking in the literature. According to Caldwell (2005), “Therapeutic recreation, while positioned as ‘therapeutic,’ has likewise neglected to well document and theoretically describe the healthful and therapeutic benefits of leisure” (p. 8).

The purpose of this paper is to clearly articulate a new theory that is emerging from the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience that provides an explanatory and empirical framework for why leisure, among other life experiences that evoke enjoyment, can drive sustained and positive lifestyle change for those with whom we work in therapeutic recreation. The Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change is a new integrative model that positions positive emotions as creating nonconscious and increasing motives for wellness behavior, rooted in enduring biological changes (Fredrickson, 2013b; Fredrickson, 2015). This theory provides an explanatory framework for flourishing through leisure, as articulated in the Flourishing through Leisure Model, addressing not only the facilitation of personal strengths, but also environmental factors necessary to promote positive change. In this paper, we overview the Flourishing through Leisure Model and the strengths approach, provide an overview of the broaden-and-build theory (which is a foundation of the Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change), and then explain the Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change in depth. Last we will describe implications of the Upward Spiral Theory for practice and research in therapeutic recreation.

**Flourishing through Leisure Model and the Strengths Approach**

Leisure participation for the purpose of well-being is at the heart of the profession of therapeutic recreation. One practice model used in therapeutic recreation, called the Flourishing through
Leisure Model: An Ecological Extension of the Leisure and Well-Being Model (Anderson & Heyne, 2012a; Anderson & Heyne, 2012b; Heyne & Anderson, 2012), is based on the premise that leisure is a strength in and of itself and a context to build other strengths. Based on the Leisure and Well-Being Model (Carruthers & Hood, 2007; Hood & Carruthers, 2007), a social model of disability, and recent discoveries in positive psychology, the Flourishing through Leisure Model follows a strengths orientation. That is, instead of developing services based on a person’s disability or deficits, services are built around the person’s unique strengths, goals, aspirations, and dreams. An ecological perspective is also used as resources in a person’s environment are considered important sources of support for leisure participation and strengthening well-being.

Overview of the Model

The Flourishing through Leisure Model describes what a therapeutic recreation specialist does and what outcomes the participant receives from services. The therapeutic process is driven by the participant’s own goals, dreams, and aspirations, a key aspect of the strengths approach (see Figure 1).

What the therapeutic recreation specialist does. The model considers the person in their environment. Here, two focus areas guide the services provided by the therapeutic recreation specialist: personal strengths of the participant and environmental resources. As such, the therapeutic recreation specialist helps the participant enhance their experience of leisure and build internal strengths while tapping environmental resources to support the participant’s progress toward greater well-being.

Outcomes the participant experiences. The outcomes of therapeutic recreation services emerge from the rich combination of personal strengths, environmental resources, and therapeutic services, including the enrichment of the leisure experience and leisure environment. The outcomes manifest as enhanced leisure experiences and positive change across the domains of well-being. These outcomes, in which the participant experiences successful, satisfying, and productive engagement with their life (Hood & Carruthers, 2007), lead to a flourishing life.

To enhance a participant’s leisure experience, the therapeutic recreation specialist facilitates the development of an array of leisure skills and knowledge within the individual. Change within leisure environments is also facilitated to support the development of those skills and knowledge. For example, the recreation therapist can assist participants in clarifying their leisure passions and talents, then help them find a club or other community setting where those interests and talents may be pursued. The therapeutic recreation specialist may also help the community setting become more accessible or inclusive. Further, a participant might discover he has the character strengths of kindness and generosity, and the therapeutic recreation specialist can help him find a volunteer placement at a local agency where he can exercise his strengths.

When leisure experiences are enhanced, other strengths and resources develop as well. For example, enjoyable participation in a fun run can boost a person’s physical fitness (physical domain), provide an opportunity to meet new people (social domain), and enable a person to contribute to a charitable organization (spiritual domain).
WELL-BEING
I experience a state of successful, satisfying, and productive engagement with my life*

Fostering a Flourishing Life

Enhancing the Leisure Experience

Facilitation of cognitive strengths:
• Ability to attend*
• Concentration*
• Following directions*
• Memory*
• Problem Solving
• Goal setting*, aspiration discovery

Facilitation of physical resources:
• Safe environments
• Universal design
• Adapted equipment
• Affordability, equitable resource distribution
• Home recreation resource development
• Community recreation resource development

Facilitation of leisure skills and knowledge:
• Savoring leisure*
• Interests, preferences
• Authentic leisure*
• Talents, abilities
• Leisure gratifications*
• Skills and competencies
• Mindful leisure*
• Virtuous leisure*
• Aspirations

Enhancing the Leisure Experience

Facilitation of leisure environments:
• Real choices for leisure
• Typical lifestyle rhythms
• Social supports
• Inclusive environments
• Physical accessibility
• Administrative inclusivity
• Programming inclusivity

Develo

gin

Strengths and Resources

Facilitation of psychological and emotional strengths:
• Capacity for happiness*
• Emotion regulation*
• Self-awareness/self-acceptance/self-congruence*
• Autonomy/self-determination/goal directedness*
• Competence*
• Optimism*

Facilitation of cognitive resources:
• Environmental cues
• Environmental modifications
• Quiet spaces in public areas
• Activity adaptations
• Other supports and accommodations

Facilitation of spiritual resources:
• Culture of hope, support and encouragement
• Proximity to nature
• Quiet places in public spaces
• Places of spiritual nourishment
• Beauty and aesthetics in the environment

Facilitation of spiritual strengths:
• Hope and inspiration
• Sense of meaning and purpose
• Peace of mind
• Reflection and wisdom
• Self-actualization
• Sense of connectedness/feeling a part of something bigger

Other character strengths and virtues

Think

Learn

Believe

Value

Play

Recreate

What the Therapeutic Recreation Specialist Does

Outcomes the Participant Experiences

Facilitation of psychological and emotional resources:
• Positive behavioral supports
• Natural cues
• Quiet spaces in public areas
• High expectations and positive attitudes
• Other supports and accommodations

Facilitation of social resources:
• Inclusivity and diversity
• Opportunities to engage in meaningful social roles
• Trained staff
• Peer support development
• Other supports and accommodations

Facilitation of social strengths:
• Communication skills*
• Interpersonal skills*
• Reciprocal relationship skills*, friendship skills
• Leadership and citizenship skills
• Social confidence*

Facilitation of physical strengths:
• Physical health*
• Mobility*
• Fitness – endurance, strength, flexibility*
• Energy and vitality
• Physical activity skills

Participant’s goals, dreams, and aspirations

PSYCHOLOGICAL & EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING
I feel happy and perceive I am in control of my life

LEISURE WELL-BEING
I find enjoyment in my leisure experiences and they positively impact other aspects of my life

COGNITIVE WELL-BEING
I think in a focused way and learn eagerly

SOCIAL WELL-BEING
I relate well to others and belong to valued social groups

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING
I do and act in my daily life with vitality and no barriers

SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING
I live my life hopefully, in harmony with my values and beliefs
Dimensions of Well-Being

Emanating from the leisure domain, the Flourishing through Leisure Model also encompasses five dimensions of well-being: psychological/emotional, cognitive, social, physical, and spiritual. This section briefly describes each dimension and provides practical examples of their application using the model. In each instance, leisure is used as a context to enhance well-being.

Psychological/emotional. Psychological and emotional strengths help us perceive the world around us, and feel and regulate a range of emotions. Someone who experiences well-being in this area would be able to experience happiness and feel in control of their life. As an example of building on personal strengths and drawing from environmental supports, a participant could increase self-awareness and cultivate calmness by participating in a community yoga or meditation class. The recreation therapist can assist the class instructor in learning needed positive behavioral supports for the participant to successfully participate.

Cognitive. Cognitive strengths are those that help us think and learn. Someone who experiences cognitive well-being would be able to think in a focused way and learn eagerly. Applying the model, a participant who wishes to enhance memory could go to a crafts store and purchase materials to create a reminiscence scrapbook or listen to music that triggers pleasant memories of past experiences. The recreation therapist can assist the participant in displaying objects that illicit positive memories, providing environmental cues.

Social. Social strengths are those that help us relate to others and belong to valued social groups. Leisure provides a natural setting for the development of social connections and community inclusion.

For example, a participant who wishes to build interpersonal skills and make friends could take part in a neighborhood social club built around a common interest (e.g., reading, hiking, dancing) or join a neighborhood community center. The recreation therapist can implement peer orientation training with the club members to facilitate full inclusion and the development of naturally sustaining social networks.

Physical. Physical strengths are those that help the participant “act” and “do” in their daily life with vitality and no barriers. Physical activity has been shown to be one of the more effective contributors to happiness and well-being (e.g., to elevate mood, reduce stress, improve cardiovascular health) (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Ratey, 2008). A participant who wishes to gain physical fitness could join a fitness center, a walking group, or a geocaching club. The recreation therapist can assist the center or club in modifying environments for accessibility.

Spiritual. Spirituality is defined as having strong and coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Seligman, 2002). As an example in this area, a person who wishes to cultivate hope and a sense of connectedness could spend time in a nature or wilderness area, find a faith community, or develop a regular yoga or meditation practice. The recreation therapist can ensure access to nature or a quiet meditative space.

The Flourishing through Leisure Model illustrates how leisure can positively impact a person’s well-being across several dimensions, in the context of their environment. When optimally facilitated within the person and their environment, an enjoyable leisure experience has the power to motivate a participant toward personal well-being, fulfilling leisure
community engagement, and a flourishing life.

The Role of Leisure

Permeating the Flourishing through Leisure Model is the underlying assumption that the leisure experience is the engine that drives the therapeutic process. This premise has been explored in past research. Caldwell (2005) identified several studies that provided empirical evidence for what she identified as three classes of research: prevention of, coping with, and transcending negative life events through leisure. A wide range of studies has identified that leisure is associated with increased positive mood, improved life satisfaction, less stress, better coping, and enhanced physical health (Caltibiano, 1995; Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Dupuis & Smale, 1995; Herzog, Franks, Markus, & Holmberg, 1998; Iwasaki, 2006; Kleiber, 1999; Kleiber, Walker, & Mannell, 2011; Lawton, 1994; Lee et al., 2012; Pressman et al., 2009; Siddiquee, Sivsmith, Lawthom, & Haworth, 2016; Siegenthaler & Vaughan, 1998; Zawadzki, Smyth, & Costigan, 2015).

Despite the consistent positive relationship between leisure and well-being, what these and many other studies lack is an explanation of how, or through what process, leisure exerts these positive outcomes. A new theory, the Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change, provides one possible explanation as to why leisure effects positive and sustained therapeutic change. Based on the broaden-and-build theory, this new theory, grounded in positive psychology and neuroscience, holds exciting potential for the justification of leisure as a context to build strengths for participants receiving therapeutic recreation services.

Overview of Broaden-and-Build Theory

The broaden-and-build theory, developed by Fredrickson (1998, 2001, 2009, 2013a, 2013b), is the foundation of the new theoretical perspective—the Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change. According to the broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions increase the number of potential behavioral options which results in resource or strength-building that is useful over time. Even though a positive emotional state is only momentary, the benefits last in the form of traits, social bonds, and abilities that endure into the future. Thus, the cultivation of positive emotions helps people lead fuller lives both in the moment that a positive emotion occurs and also long-term. As those moments of broadened awareness accumulate and compound, they build resourcefulness, helping expand resilience, social networks, physical health, creativity, and ingenuity (Fredrickson, 2001, 2009). The implication of this theory is that positive emotions have inherent value to human growth and development, and to human health.

In summary, the broaden-and-build theory has two different temporal aspects: a broaden aspect that is in the moment and a long-term aspect that likens positive emotions to nutrients that help us grow into better versions of ourselves (Frederickson, 2009, 2013b, 2015). According to Fredrickson (2015),

Our day-to-day habitual positive emotions don’t just make us feel uplifted, alive, and energized, they change us biologically as evidenced by greater heart rate variability which is an objective marker of health. Positivity has long-term effects on the physical body.
The Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change

Knowing that positivity has both momentary and long-term benefits, how can it be increased in one's life to improve and sustain well-being, and in particular one's health? Fredrickson (2015) stated that positivity resonates over time and links us up to our future selves. She asks, “How can we use the science of positive emotion to help us do the things we want to do, to make lifestyle changes in particular?”

Changing one’s lifestyle is an important pathway to well-being. Recent and alarming statistics highlight why it is important to assist people in making day-to-day positive changes in the way they live their lives. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2016), 40% of all premature deaths are attributable to modifiable lifestyle choices. Of all cancers, 62% are attributable to lifestyle choices, including smoking, exercise, and eating habits. The obesity rate for adults in the U.S. is over 30%, and for children and youth it is 20% (CDC, 2016). For people with disabilities, the obesity rate is even higher than the general population (Anderson & Heyne, 2010; Rimmer, Rowland, & Yamaki, 2007). Mental health statistics also show that more than 18% of U.S. adults experience a mental illness and, in particular, depression (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016).

It is obvious that lifestyle change is often imperative to achieving well-being for many people. However, willpower alone does not work to create lasting lifestyle change. Decades of evidence support that willpower runs out and cognitive effort does not bring about sustained change (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). According to Fredrickson (2013b), people know they are making poor daily behavioral choices, but knowing is not powerful enough to override nonconscious desires and habitual routine.

The Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change offers one explanation of a pathway to lifestyle change that is sustainable (Fredrickson, 2015). The driver, or engine, of sustainable lifestyle change is positive emotion in the form of enjoyment. Enjoyment motivates. Fredrickson (2013b) states, “Positive emotions achieve what New Year’s resolutions cannot by motivating sustained adherence to health behaviors” (p. 37). Research has shown that positive emotion associated with enjoyment gives a boost to dwindling willpower (Tice, Baumeister, Shmueli, & Muraven, 2004).

However, to say enjoyment is rewarding is only part of the explanation of sustainable lifestyle change. Several studies have identified enjoyment as a key variable in sustaining wellness behavior (Abraham, Velenczei, & Szabo, 2012; Craike & Hibbins, 2010; Henderson & Ainsworth, 2002; Sorensen, 2005; Wankel, 1993, 1994). But why is enjoyment motivating? What are the causal mechanisms for the motivation of enjoyment? If the causal pathways can be understood, targeted interventions can be designed to capitalize on those pathways to enjoyment.

Neuroscience Perspective on Enjoyment

Neuroscience, or the study of brain structure and function, offers tremendous insight into the psychology of human behavior. Using new and emerging technologies, researchers are able to more fully understand how we think, feel, and act. Researchers now have physical evidence to link the brain as a functioning
organ with the mind—how we think, feel, act, and perceive can now be physically observed, not just inferred. Complex human experiences like enjoyment can now be studied more objectively.

The neuroscience of enjoyment can be further understood by examining two conceptual areas that illuminate critical processes—the neuroscience of addiction and the neuroscience of sickness behaviors. The neuroscience of addiction (Berridge, 2007) provides a base to understand positive emotion because addictions are “hijacked” positive emotions, and “hijacked” pleasures in particular (Fredrickson, 2015). Research in addiction, which studies reward centers in the brain, has illuminated the complex patterns of pleasure, enjoyment, and motivation (Berridge & Kringelbach, 2011; Berridge, Robinson, & Aldridge, 2009). According to Berridge (2007), there is not one reward center in the brain; there are separate liking, wanting, and incentive salience areas of the brain. When these areas are activated, we are motivated to repeat an activity, even nonconsciously.

How is liking something different from wanting something? Liking and wanting are distinct constructs in the reward system (Fredrickson, 2015). Liking something is enjoyable. Wanting something is different—there is a willingness to work, or put effort, toward something. Wanting is a measure of how willing someone is to work for reward. Liking is more of an opioid phenomenon; wanting is more of a dopemenergic phenomenon (Berridge et al., 2009). Thus, liking, or enjoyment, has a different brain pathway than wanting, or willingness to work for something.

Between liking and wanting is a non-conscious incentive salience, which is like a perceptual magnetism (Fredrickson, 2015). People and objects that have been associated with past pleasant experiences loom large in perception and draw one into putting effort into re-experiencing that situation. According to Fredrickson (2015), “The mule persistently walking toward the carrot dangling from a stick is not captivated by the carrot all on its own. The mule has to have enjoyed carrots before to want to walk toward the carrot.” Once someone has enjoyed something, it pops out in the environment:

When you enjoy something, some little fireworks goes off and covers the people and objects associated with enjoyment with a bit of glitter dust. When you see that person or object again, it pops out and grabs your attention and motivates you. It is a lasting learning at unconscious levels. There isn’t a deliberate aspect to this. This is how things we have enjoyed in the past grab our attention (Fredrickson, 2015).

Behavioral maintenance can be explained by the Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change in this way: To the extent that one likes something creates nonconscious incentive salience which predicts willingness to work, or wanting something, which allows one to enjoy it again. We don’t just like our favorite activities, we want our favorite activities. It is a loop of behavioral maintenance. This can also be the loop of addiction. However, what differentiates the loop of addiction from the loop of wellness behavior maintenance is the broaden-and-build upward spiral associated with a wellness behavior (see Figure 2) (Fredrickson, 2013b, 2015).

Additionally, the neuroscience of sickness behavior (Eisenberger et al., 2010) can illuminate the neuroscience of wellness behavior maintenance. Sickness
behavior can be thought of as a suite of motivations and behaviors that mute the effects of positive emotion. The suite of sickness behaviors include lack of energy, isolation from others, and anhedonia (Eisenberger et al., 2010). According to Eisenberger and colleagues (2010), the adaptive evolutionary reason for sickness behavior is that it helps us recover from illness and keep from spreading sickness to others. Low energy is adaptive, not necessarily a physical aspect of being sick. Brain scans show reward areas of the brain are muted, like the volume has been turned down.

Fredrickson (2015) looked at the suite of sickness behaviors and asked whether there was a matching opposing suite of wellness behaviors. This would include things like being physically active, being social, learning new things, pursuing meaning, eating well, and caring for the body. The basic principle behind this suite of wellness behaviors is that biological systems may also amplify the positive emotion yield of wellness behaviors, making them increasingly appealing. Our inner biological state can turn up the volume on the positive emotion system, which can make certain positive behaviors increasingly rewarding over time.

Bringing these two ideas together (addiction and sickness behavior), the upward spiral theory of lifestyle change looks at a suite of wellness behaviors. The overarching hypothesis of this theory states that positive emotions create nonconscious and increasing motives for wellness behaviors. To the extent that a wellness behavior (e.g., hiking, meditating, cycling) yields positive emotions, nonconscious motives are created, a sort

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**Figure 2.** The Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change. Adapted from Fredrickson (2015)
of perceptual magnetism. People and objects associated with that past activity command our attention and draw us to them. In addition, there is a broaden-and-build outer loop, which sets this process apart from the addiction process (Fredrickson, 2015). Positive emotions are distinct from pleasure in that they have a pathway to broaden awareness and build resources (see Figure 2). Whereas pleasures can keep us getting hooked on the same activity over and over, positive emotions, because they broaden awareness and build resources, also increase flexibility and build resourcefulness. Some of these positive resources built by positive emotion then bend back and amplify the positive emotion yield of wellness behaviors. There is an inner loop to the upward spiral model and an outer loop. The inner loop is the dopaminergic pathway that has nonconscious motives or nonconscious incentive salience as its driving mechanism. In the outer loop, positive emotions build psychological and biological resources that then moderate or amplify the positive emotion yield of wellness behaviors which is what creates this upward spiral where our motives for these wellness behaviors become increasingly entrenched and stronger over time. Once people get on a roll with a positive wellness behavior, the enjoyable wellness behavior becomes increasingly rewarding in an upward spiral.

This upward spiral builds biological resources in addition to emotional, cognitive, and social resources. A key indicator of physical health is vagal heart tone (Fredrickson, 2013b, 2015). As a result of enjoyment, people show higher vagal heart tone and then get a bigger boost of positive emotions from an enjoyable activity which leads to even higher vagal tone (Kok et al., 2013). Neurological and biological plasticity (e.g., gene expression, heart rate) affects our psychological experience. Plasticity is a reflection or expression of our habitual behaviors. The dual spiral action of the theory of positive lifestyle change posits that plasticity can “knit us” to wellness behaviors (Fredrickson, 2015).

The active ingredient of sustained positive behavior change is positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2013b). According to Fredrickson (2015), positive emotions don’t just make a new lifestyle change tolerable, they are the active ingredients that will predict whether we will sustain that behavior or not. The predictors that get a person to initiate a wellness behavior change are not the same predictors that help them sustain the change. Positive emotion inspires more involvement (e.g., more practice, more training, more effort) and sustained behavior over time.

How do you activate positivity and, in particular, enjoyment? How do you glean more positive emotion from an experience? Pursuing passion and prioritizing positivity are two key amplifiers of the upward spiral of positive lifestyle change (Fredrickson, 2015).

**Passion**

Spontaneous positive thoughts (what is always on your mind) are indicators of nonconscious salience or motives. The things we are passionate about, that we love and associate with enjoyment, tend to arise spontaneously within our consciousness. We don’t have to deliberately think about them—they pop to mind (Fredrickson, 2015; Vallerand, 2012; Vallerand & Verner-Filion, 2013). When people have something they enjoy about an activity, they are more likely to have spontaneous positive thoughts about that activity, and are thus more likely to engage in it, in an upward spiral (Fredrickson, 2015). This is the case with passions.
The extent to which people identify an enjoyable activity as a harmonious passion, more positive emotion is experienced, which in turn amplifies the positive emotion yield of a wellness behavior. According to Vallerand (2012), having a passion for an activity can lead to high involvement in activities that may lead to sustainable positive effects on well-being. People who have a passion for an activity typically engage in it several hours a week. Passion, in particular harmonious passion, plays a critical role in sustainable well-being (Vallerand, 2010). People will spend large amounts of time and effort in order to reach their passionate goals or pursuing an activity that they love (Vallerand, 2012). Passion, in particular harmonious passion, plays a critical role in sustainable well-being (Vallerand, 2010). People will spend large amounts of time and effort in order to reach their passionate goals or pursuing an activity that they love (Vallerand, 2012). Vallerand et al. (2003) define passion as a strong inclination toward a self-defining activity that one likes (or even loves), finds important, and in which one invests time and energy on a regular basis. Passions represent central features of one’s identity. According to Vallerand (2012), there are two types of passion, obsessive and harmonious, and it is harmonious passion that is internalized into one’s identity and leads to positive outcomes.

**Obsessive passion.** Obsessive passions are activities that result from intrapersonal or interpersonal pressure to participate (Vallerand, 2012). Obsessive passionate activities have contingencies attached to participation, such as needing social acceptance or self-esteem or needing the excitement from the activity. People with an obsessive passion feel an uncontrollable urge to participate and experience a rigid persistence in the activity. This leads to conflict with other aspects of one’s life as well as rumination, frustration, and inflexibility in choosing alternative activities (Vallerand, 2012). Though obsessive passions may lead to benefits to the person, they mostly result in negative versus positive emotion over time.

**Harmonious passion.** Harmonious passions are freely accepted activities that are important to someone without any contingencies attached (Vallerand, 2012). Harmonious passions are intrinsic and integrative. They align with positive emotions and are reciprocal to positive spontaneous thoughts (Fredrickson, 2015). The more you enjoy an activity, the more positive spontaneous thoughts you have about it, and the more you build harmonious passions. According to Vallerand (2012), “with harmonious passion the authentic integrating self is at play, allowing the person to fully partake in the passionate activity with a flexibility and a mindful open manner that is conducive to positive experiences” (p. 6).

Harmonious passions then lead to sustained and positive emotion, where people experience positive outcomes both during and after participation. According to Vallerand (2012),

Taking into consideration the fact that harmonious passion leads to regular engagement in the passionate activity that translates into positive affect during activity engagement, that such positive affect seems to endure for a substantial period of time, and that positive affect positively predicts psychological well-being, it would appear that having a harmonious passion can lead people to experience cumulative experiences of positive affect that should facilitate and sustain well-being as well as protect against ill-being. Thus, harmonious passion is expected to play a dual role of leading people to engage in the
passionate activity on a regular basis and to do so in a way as to derive important emotional benefits from one’s engagement that foster well-being. (p. 12)

Prioritizing Positivity

Prioritizing positivity is using situation selection as an emotion regulation tool to leverage positive emotions (Catalino, Algoe, & Fredrickson, 2014). People who experience higher prioritization of positive emotions show more willingness to work or put effort into doing things, even things that are not enjoyable, that will lead to enjoyment. They also show more behavioral maintenance of new wellness behaviors. Prioritizing positivity is a resource that boosts the positive emotion yield of a wellness behavior. People higher in prioritizing positivity engage more readily in new wellness behaviors that evoke positive emotions. They invest more time in an activity, akin to strengthening a muscle. Prioritizing positivity is a catalyst to put more positive emotion in daily life, which leads to an upward spiral of sustained habits which lead to further positive emotion.

Prioritizing positivity can be conceptualized as
- making it a priority to experience happiness in everyday life;
- looking for and nurturing positive emotions;
- deciding what to do with time outside of work based on how much positive emotions will likely be experienced;
- structuring one’s day to maximize happiness;
- making major decisions in life (e.g., job, house, vacations) based on how much one may experience positive emotions; and
- admiring people who make their decisions based on the happiness they will gain.

Harmonious passions and prioritizing positivity amplify or boost the upward spiral of lifestyle change. This in turn strengthens the allure or “pop” of nonconscious salience, the “glitter dust” that fuels the sustained upward spiral.

“Glitter Dust” and Leisure

Spontaneous effortless thoughts, or nonconscious salience, feeds wellness behavior maintenance. Nonconscious salience is formed through enjoyment of an activity. Creating past positive experiences is a critical variable. Cues associated with past pleasant experiences gain nonconscious incentive salience and become intrinsically alluring “as if covered in eye-catching glitter dust” (Fredrickson, 2013b, p. 38). Recreation therapists who help participants identify and pursue harmonious passions and prioritize those passions into daily life help to form the “glitter dust” and fuel the upward spiral of positive lifestyle change.

Passion associated with leisure has been shown to have a greater impact on well-being and positive emotion than passion associated with other life areas (Siddiquee et al., 2016; Zawadzki et al., 2015). Several studies have identified how involvement in passionate leisure activities leads to increased positive emotion and a building of resources (Harmon & Kyle, 2015; Hogan, Catalino, Mata, & Fredrickson, 2015; Mageau & Vallerand, 2007; Stenseng, 2008), increased health and quality of life (Iwasaki, Coyle, & Shank, 2011; Vallerand & Verner-Filion, 2013), increased well-being (Curran et al., 2015; Herzog et al., 1998), increased social connectedness (Stenseng, Forest, & Curran, 2015), and increased physical ac-
Using an ecological perspective, the environment can also play a role in facilitating the development and maintenance of “glitter dust” and, in turn, wellness behavior. Environmental cues are important and trigger wanting of a favorite activity (Newman, 2015). For example, if hiking is a passion, having posters and photos of hiking destinations prominently displayed, guide books of popular hikes, maps and bookmarked websites in view, and hiking boots by the door will increase the nonconscious salience of the wellness behavior. Joining a hiking club that sends out announcements of upcoming hikes, organized gear exchanges, and other hiking related activities will further boost the “glitter dust” of lifestyle change behavior mechanisms.

In sum, positive emotions are the tiny engines of positive change (Fredrickson, 2013b). Consistent with the broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions help support efforts to change one’s life and acquire new skills (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2010). Passions and prioritizing positivity help fuel those tiny engines, triggering sustained involvement in wellness behaviors in an upward spiral. The upward spiral is driven by what we like, which leads to nonconscious salience ("glitter dust") associated with that activity and increased motivation to participate, becoming an activity we want to participate in. This in turn leads to broadening our behavioral repertoire and building resources which leads to further involvement in the wellness cycle. Table 1 summarizes the language of the Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change. Enjoyment, passion, and leisure play important roles in the upward spiral toward health.

Implications for TR/RT Practice: Leisure as “Glitter Dust”

In therapeutic recreation practice, how can we best shape positive spontaneous thoughts and emotions in the service of positive self-regulation and health? One avenue to shape positivity is to help participants nurture their harmonious passions for leisure pursuits. These harmonious passions act as the “glitter dust” that helps build lasting lifestyle change. They provide the “wow-power” versus the “will-power” to develop and maintain wellness behaviors.

Passions can be assessed by asking about favorite activities, using methods such as the Passion Interview (McGill, 1996) or other interview or assessment instruments that measure favorite activities (Anderson & Heyne, 2013). Once favorite activities are identified, recreation therapists can administer the Passion Scale (Vallerand et al., 2003) to determine if the passionate activity is harmonious or obsessive. Harmonious passions can then be supported and facilitated as a core component of a participant’s therapeutic recreation services.

Recreation therapists can also use strategies to prioritize or leverage positivity in participants’ daily lives. One approach to amplify positive emotion is proactive situation selection in one’s day. Education about the benefits of prioritizing positivity will also increase awareness of the need to be purposeful in doing so. Therapeutic recreation specialists can help participants devote time each day to activities that generate positive emotions (e.g., leisure, hobbies, sports, nature). They can use strategies like the “ta-da” list that teaches participants to set aside time each day for feel-good or pleasant activities. Participants can add the “ta-da” list along with their “to-do” list as a daily
Table 1
The Language of Flourishing through Leisure and the Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept or Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
<td>The actual pleasure component or hedonic impact of a reward or something desired (Berridge, Robinson, &amp; Aldridge, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting</td>
<td>The motivation for reward; a willingness to work for reward (Berridge, Robinson, &amp; Aldridge, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonconscious Incentive Salience</td>
<td>“Glitter dust”; past pleasant experiences impact perception and draw one into putting effort into re-experiencing that situation, like a mule with a carrot. Once someone has enjoyed something, it pops out in the environment without thinking about it, providing nonconscious motivational incentive (Fredrickson, 2015).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>A strong inclination toward a self-defining activity that one likes (or even loves), finds important, invests time and energy on a regular basis, and represents central features of one’s identity (Vallerand, 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonious Passion</td>
<td>Freely accepted activities that are important to someone without any contingencies attached, that are intrinsic and integrative, align with positive emotions and are reciprocal to positive spontaneous thoughts. In harmonious passion, the authentic integrating self is at play, allowing the person to fully partake in the passionate activity with a flexibility and a mindful open manner (Vallerand, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obsessive Passion</td>
<td>Activities that result from intrapersonal or interpersonal pressure to participate, that have contingencies attached to participation, that have an uncontrollable urge to participate, and a rigid persistence leading to conflict with other aspects of one’s life as well as rumination, frustration, and inflexibility in choosing alternative activities (Vallerand, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion</td>
<td>A brief, multisystem response to some change in the way people interpret their current circumstances. When this multisystem response registers that circumstances are somehow good for the self, a positive emotion arises (Fredrickson, 2013b).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>Where pleasure relates to satisfying needs like hunger, thirst, or taking a long sleep after a tough day or experiencing positive sensations, enjoyment comes from intellectual stimulation and creativity. Enjoyment also involves being challenged and standing up to it (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Seligman, 2011).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
habit. Other typical leisure education and relaxation strategies can be used as well.

Therapeutic recreation specialists can use strategies to increase the level of positive emotion associated with harmoniously passionate activities. Recreation therapists can teach participants about positive emotions—what they are, what tends to trigger them, what thought-action tendency is triggered, and what resources are likely built (see Table 2). Therapeutic recreation specialists can teach savoring skills to amplify the positive aspects of a leisure experience (Anderson & Heyne, 2012a; Hood & Carruthers, 2007). Gratitude journals focused on leisure experiences can be used to increase positive emotion (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Recreation therapists can facilitate leisure and social connections to build social support and positive emotion. Other strategies to amplify positive emotion and thought include debriefing to accentuate the positive and the use of environmental cues to build nonconscious salience (Newman, 2015).

Last, recreation therapists can teach proven practices that induce positive emotion, such as Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM) (Fredrickson, 2013a). In addition to teaching LKM, therapeutic recreation specialists can give participants resources like ipods to use LKM on their own.

Helping participants prioritize passions and positivity is a catalyst to put more positive emotion in daily life, which leads to an upward spiral of sustained habits. This in turn leads to further positive emotion and higher well-being. Instead of focusing only on functional outcomes, and marginalizing leisure in our practice, recreation therapists need to also focus on increasing recreation enjoyment through the leisure experience. Positive emotions are highly consequential, and we should never trivialize enjoyment or fun. As Barbara Fredrickson (2015) stated, “Which to deploy? Will power or positive emotion? Instead of saying ‘Just do it,’ we should be saying ‘Just enjoy it!’”

Recommendations for Future Research

“We live in the world our questions create.”
—David Cooperrider (2015)

The Upward Spiral Theory of Lifestyle Change offers an explanatory pathway between leisure, enjoyment, and positive lifestyle change. Research questions in therapeutic recreation can be framed around ascertaining the effectiveness of strategies that build meaningful leisure passions, other strengths, and positivity. Measuring changes in positive emotions and positive thoughts as a result of facilitated leisure and recreation experiences would be important indicators of initial lifestyle change. Long-term studies that focus on how passions and wellness behaviors are sustained and what factors most facilitate sustainability would help to develop effective interventions using the recreation experience. Research should focus on measuring global outcomes like well-being and quality of life as recreation therapists assist participants in pursuing passions and prioritizing positivity through the leisure experience.

The Flourishing through Leisure Model could also be used as a framework for documenting positive change across the dimensions of well-being (i.e., psychological/emotional, cognitive, social, physical, spiritual). For example, including measures of physical changes, like cardiac vagal tone or heart rate variability, blood pressure, and total cortisol, would help explore increases in positivity and well-being (Fredrickson, 2015; Pressman et al., 2009).
### Table 2

**Definitions of Ten Frequently Experienced Positive Emotions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Emotion</th>
<th>What Tends to Trigger the Emotion</th>
<th>Thought-Action Tendency Triggered</th>
<th>Resources Accrued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Safe, familiar, unexpectedly good</td>
<td>Play, get involved, free activation</td>
<td>Skills gained via experiential learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>Receive a benefit or gift</td>
<td>Creative urge to be prosocial</td>
<td>Skills for showing care, loyalty, social bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serenity or contentment</td>
<td>Safe, familiar, low effort</td>
<td>Savor, integrate</td>
<td>New priorities, new views of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>Safe, novel</td>
<td>Explore, learn</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Fearing the worst, yearning for better</td>
<td>Plan for a better future</td>
<td>Resilience, optimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Socially valued achievement</td>
<td>Dream big</td>
<td>Achievement motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amusement</td>
<td>Non-serious social incongruity</td>
<td>Share, be jovial, laugh</td>
<td>Social bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration</td>
<td>Witness human excellence</td>
<td>Strive toward own higher ground</td>
<td>Motivation for personal growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awe</td>
<td>Encounter beauty or goodness on a grand scale</td>
<td>Absorb, accommodate</td>
<td>New worldviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Any/all of the above in an interpersonal connection</td>
<td>Any/all of the above with mutual care</td>
<td>Any/all of the above, especially social bonds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from Fredrickson (2013b)*
Research studies could also focus on the impact of using environmental cues to amplify or build nonconscious salience, or “glitter dust,” and the role it plays in the sustainability of wellness behaviors. Researchers could design studies that use posters, photos, recreational equipment, music, email messages, and the like as independent variables in studying increased participation in harmoniously passionate activities as the dependent variable.

Experimental studies could also be designed that compare the effectiveness of prescribed functional activities (the “stick”) with passionate leisure activities (the “carrot”) in creating sustained positive lifestyle change for recipients of therapeutic recreation services.

As Dr. Fredrickson (2015) stated, “Positive emotions light the path to lifestyle change.” Therapeutic recreation can be a major light post along that path by helping participants identify and build passions, dreams, and aspirations while facilitating the journey to sustained well-being. We can help make more “glitter dust” to effect positive lifestyle change.

References

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