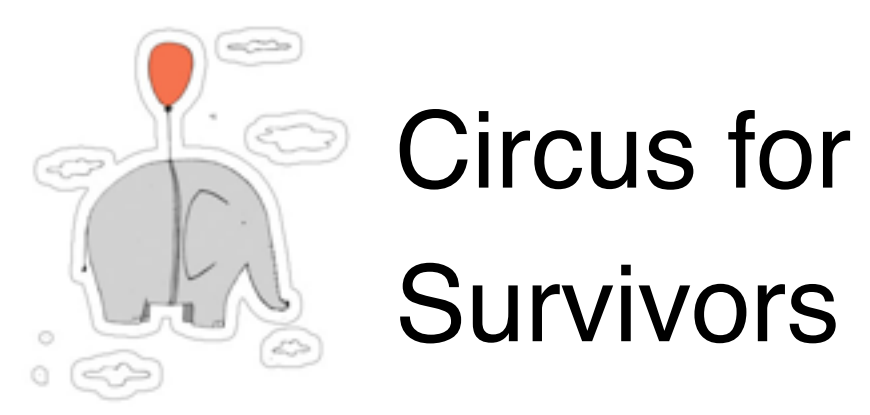


Circus arts & occupational therapy: Gaining great performance

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Introduction

With a circus intervention, each person, in accordance with their abilities, is able to realize their potential through a wide range of activities that circus offers: juggling, trapeze, acrobatics, contortionism, clowning, & balancing acts. A person who does not have flexibility can participate in balancing acts; a person who does not have ability to do trapeze can be a clown.



Photo credit: Susan Keese VPR

Intervention

- Name Games
- Ice Breakers
- Partner Acrobatics
- Juggling
- Tight Wire Walking
- Trapeze
- Aerial fabric
- Clowning
- Cool Down Stretches
- “See you down the road”
- (All above activities are OT groups, working on articulating emotions, balance, bi-manual coordination, gross & fine motor skills, social skills, graded goal attainment, positive risk taking).

Illustrative quotes

“Juggling. Something I’d never think I’d be able to do, though I still can only juggle scarves, it’s a start.”

“Rediscover your body, your beauty, your strength while having a really fun time.”

Populations

Krepels Center Portsmouth, NH

- Community center
- Adults 18+ with ABI/TBI
- Open group - 3-15 participants
- Frequency - 60” per week

Butler Hospital Providence, RI

- Psychiatric hospital
- Ages 12-17 (DX: Mood D/O, Bipolar, Depression)
- Open group - 1-6 participants
- Frequency - 45” 2x/wk

Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries, Boston, MA

- Day habilitation program
- Adults 22+ with intellectual disability
- Closed group - 4 participants
- Frequency - 60” per week

Circus for Survivors Brattleboro, VT

- Community group
- Cancer survivors ages 33-82
- Open group 6-12 participants
- Frequency - 120” per month

Beverly School for the Deaf, Beverly, MA

- Day school
- Children ages 3-22 (Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or other communication d/o, & additional co-morbidities)
- Open - 68 students + staff
- Frequency - one workshop for 75”

Observations

- Alternative identity through circus
- Motor planning & bimanual hand coordination Outlet for play & social experimentation
- Performance at end gave focus & meaning to skills learned

- Positive affect by end of group
- Consistent member participation
- Unit team saw circus as beneficial

- Smoother motor planning & coordination
- Increased eye contact
- Increased verbalization
- Gained new occupation

- Reprieve from cancer
- Participants able to play
- Gained self-efficacy
- Reconnect to their bodies
- Recalled positive risk taking experience & applied to new challenges
- Movement/exercise

- Focus & attention
- Participation with others
- New experience
- Engagement with unfamiliar adults in safe environment
- Constant grading to enable participation for all ability levels

Illustrative quotes

“I have not felt this beautiful since my surgery. Just as cancer teaches you that you can live through stresses you never imagined, this program teaches you that your body can fly!”

Conclusion

A thematic analysis of program evaluations showed circus as intervention enabled participation in movement & exercise; enhance positive affect, experiencing flow state, new occupational roles & opportunities for self-determination. Further research around circus and its role within occupational therapy is needed. A wider search for participants in circus workshops could offer a larger sample & provide a more indepth look into this phenomenon.

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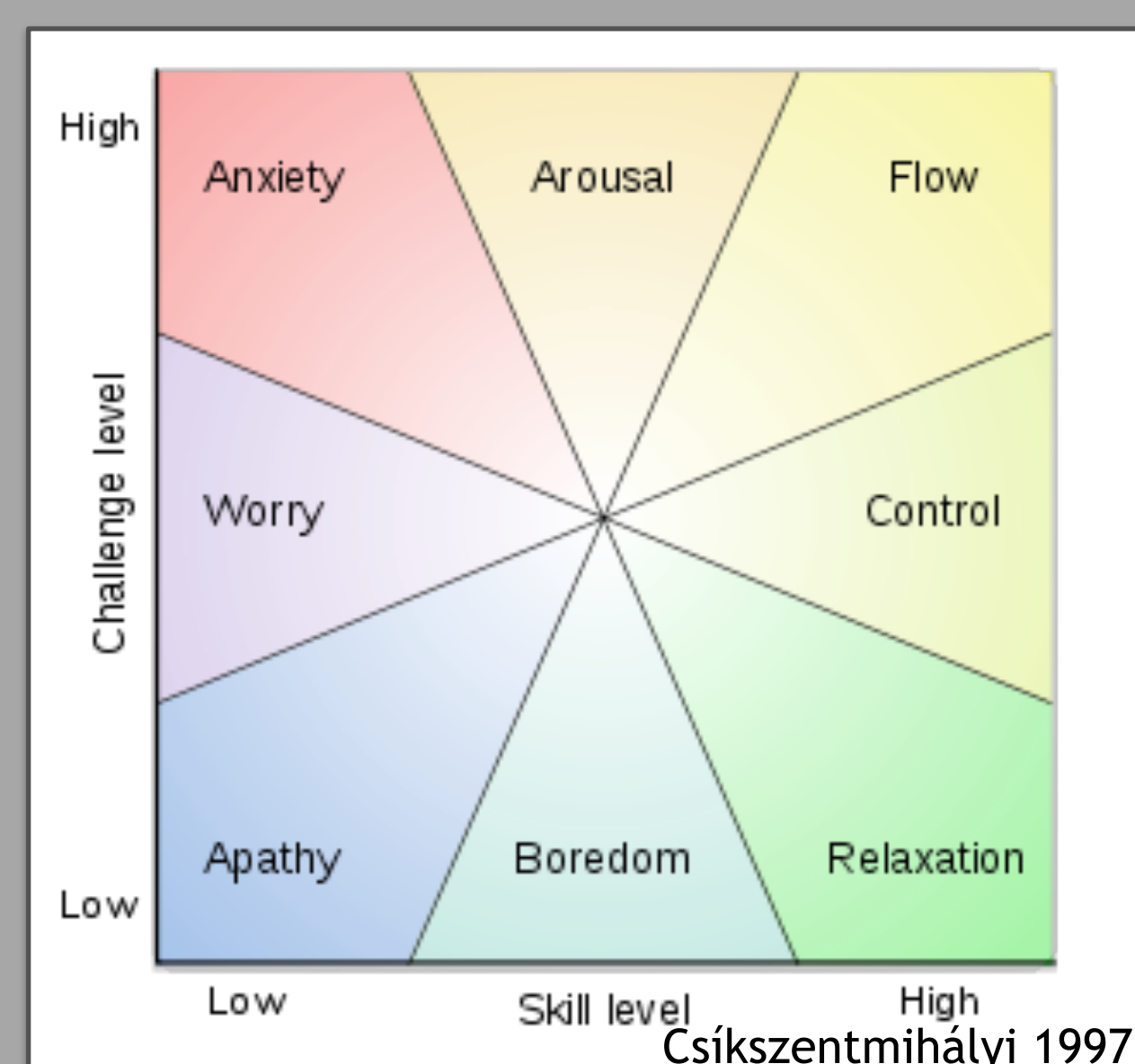
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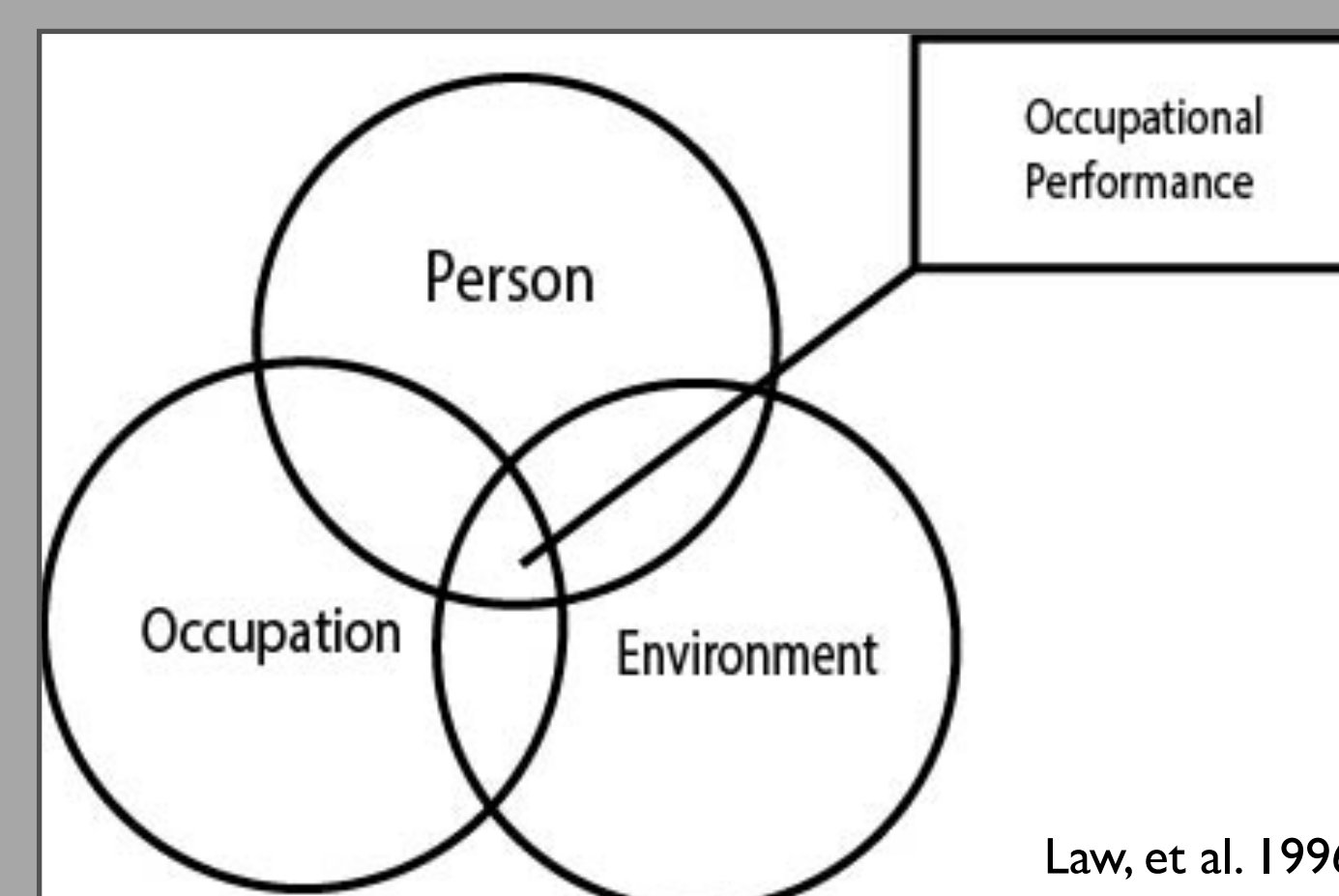
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Frames of Reference

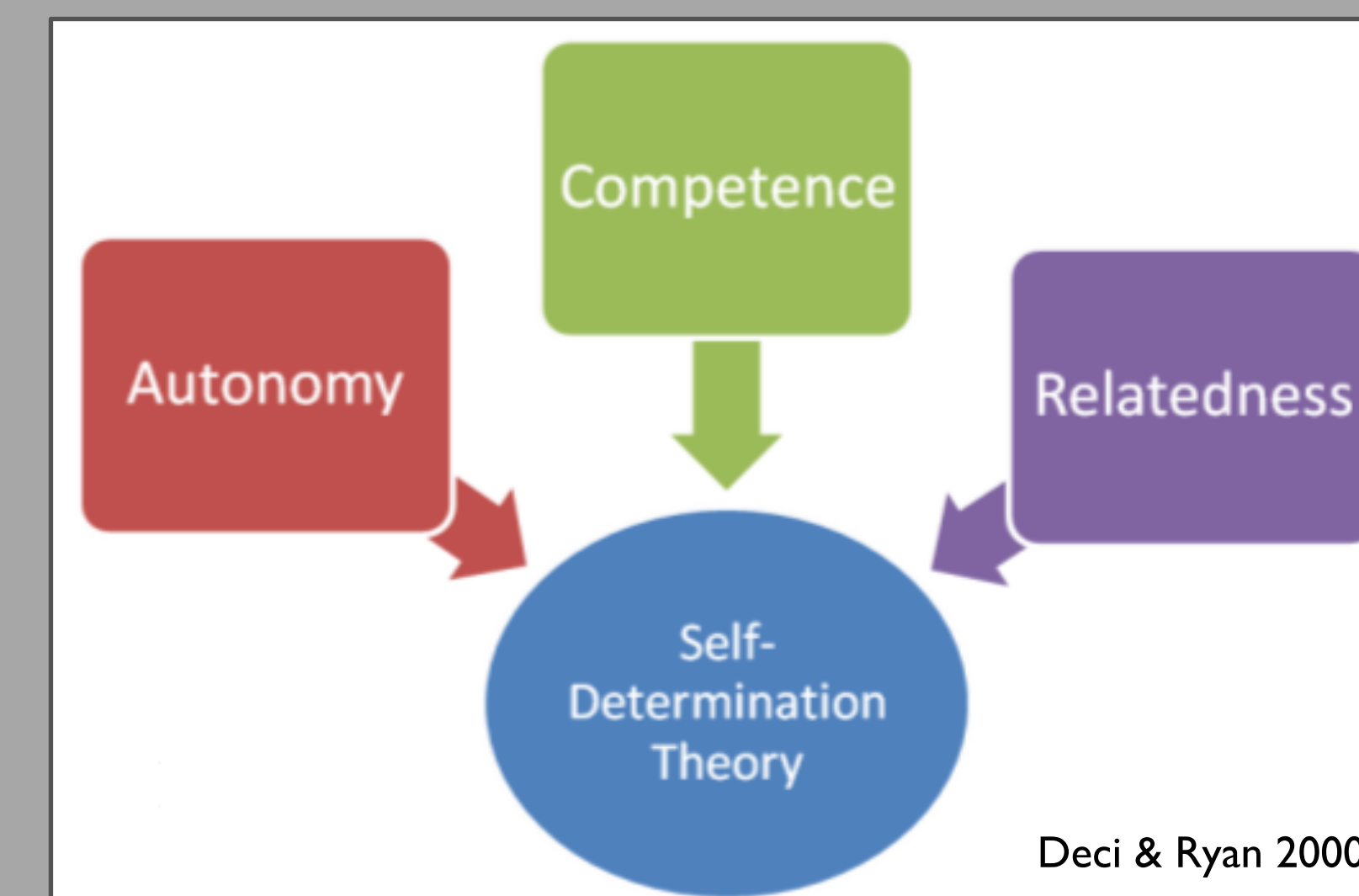
Flow - people are happiest in a state of concentrations or complete absorption with activity at hand (Csikszentmihályi 1997).



Person / Environment / Occupation (PEO) - transactional relationship between people, their occupation & roles & environment (Law, et al. 1996).



Self-determination theory (SDT) - macro theory of human motivation concerning intrinsic growth tendencies, inherent psychological needs, & motivation behind choices (Deci & Ryan 2000).



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