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Abstract: Focuses on swimmers' motivation and Abraham H. Maslow's theory of humans needs. What motivates swimmers to engage in the sport; Maslow's five basic human needs; Discussion of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. INSET: Maslow's heirarchy of needs.

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MOTIVATION

MASLOW'S SWIMMER

EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW

Abraham H. Maslow (1908-1970) published his theory of human motivation in 1943, and its popularity today remains undiminished. Maslow believed that actualization was the driving force behind human personality, as he stated in his book, "Motivation and Personality."

He writes, "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself What a man can be, he must be."

The popular humanistic psychologist placed self-actualization as the highest drive in a hierarchy of needs and believed that a person must satisfy lower motivations like hunger and belonging before moving up the ladder of needs. His hierarchy has five levels (see illustration below).

When applied to adult fitness and competitive swimming, we find swimmers who claim all five levels as reasons for participating in the activity. Maslow pointed out that the hierarchy is dynamic and that the dominant need is always shifting. For example, a swimmer may be immersed in the self-actualization of swimming, but eventually grows tired and hungry.

While stopping for nourishment, he engages in conversation with a fellow swimmer, thus satisfying two needs simultaneously. Once he's had a 100-calorie snack and chatted for five minutes, his physiological and social needs may have been reduced, and he's ready to get back in the swim of things.

Being involved in an organized Masters swim program can bring satisfaction on all five levels of the hierarchy. It may be an interesting exercise to determine which is, in general,

the strongest motivation for you. What keeps you heading back to the pool day after day, year after year? What drives you to take the plunge into an often chilly pool or a vast ocean?

Physiological

The most basic of our needs is quite often the most popular. Flip through SWIM Magazine and you're likely to find information on nutrition, body and hair care, fitness and the aging process. Many Masters swimmers experiment with nutritional plans that will make them healthier and give them the "edge." Water bottles are prevalent on deck during workouts, and food and drink are a primary concern to long-distance and open-water swimmers. And who hasn't enjoyed a sound night of sleep after a tough workout or a few challenging races?

Safety

"Safety first" is a common theme in any populated area. Around a swimming pool, safety is of even greater importance due to the potential for accidents and even drowning in an aquatic environment. Typically, lifeguards or certified coaches who are trained to respond to emergency situations oversee groups of swimmers. A list of rules and regulations, along with safety equipment, are commonly within eyesight. Particularly at outdoor pools, the appearance of nearby lightning is an unquestionable reason to cease swimming and exit the pool immediately.

Even in an organized workout, safety is inherent in the group's rules of order. Swimmers are instructed to swim "circles" to avoid collisions, while in narrow lanes, butterflyers must take heed not to smack hands with approaching swimmers. In shallow water, diving can be hazardous to the careless swimmer, possibly causing severe head and neck injuries.

Social

How many swimmers have claimed, "I can't do it alone!"? The presence of other swimmers not only seems to make the workout fly by, but it also provides the opportunity to develop friendships and to be accepted by peers. Swimmers share an aquatic bond and relate to the challenges specific to the aquatic genre. It is common not only for a swimmer to feel good about finishing a workout, but to share those feelings with others who have done the same.

As part of a Masters club, we may belong to a "lane" or a subset of swimmers within the workout group. On a wider scale, we belong to an LMSC, a zone and united States Masters Swimming.

Esteem

Our needs for esteem may be satisfied both internally and externally. Internally, we can further develop a positive self-image by participating in swimming. Overcoming the many challenges offered in swimming on an almost daily basis can lead to a feeling of intense self-satisfaction and inner fulfillment. In a sense, an inner transformation can occur as we learn a new skill, improve our flip turns or give our all in competition.

Externally, our self-esteem can be enhanced by recognition, which often leads to attention. Interestingly, external recognition can be a very strong drive for some athletes, while others may shy away from it, content with their internal victories. Swimming is full of recognition--with its trophies, medals and ribbons, All-American and Top Ten lists, and prestigious national honors such as the Ransom Arthur Award and Coach of the Year. However, some of the most valued recognition may be a simple pat on the back from a coach or an enthusiastic "way to go!" from a teammate.

Self-actualization

Once the above needs have been satisfied, the swimmer can move to the top of the hierarchy to experience self-actualization. Also called self-realization, self-actualization is activity for the love of doing, a natural expression of one's self which is often accompanied by feelings of joy, timelessness and a deep inner fulfillment.

It's the feeling of being "lost" in activity, be it swimming, knitting or painting. It is an intrinsically rewarding experience which is often characterized by a feeling of "flow" in which there is a loss of personal ego and an awareness of a universal force at hand. Basketball players talk of playing in the "zone," where time seems to move slowly; baskets are made "unconsciously."

In terms of motivation, swimming is a microcosm of life. While Abraham Maslow, in his years of research, was studying human motivation, he was also, perhaps unknowingly, discovering the motivations of the adult swimmer.

At the highest level of motivation, yes, the musician must play his music, the artist must paint and the poet must write. But what becomes of those not inclined as musicians, artists and poets? Ah, the swimmer must swim.

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS 5. Self-actualization

(fulfillment of personal potential, self-knowledge, transcendence)

4. Esteem

(internal: self-respect, autonomy, achievement; external: status, recognition, attention)

3. Social

(belonging, acceptance, friendship, affection)

2. Safety

(preservation of life, security, protection from physical and emotional harm)

1. Physiological

(hunger, thirst, shelter, rest, warmth, sex)

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