Human Needs

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Overview

Abstract

Human need and related concepts such as basic needs have long been part of the implicit conceptual foundation for social work theory, practice, and research. However, while the published literature in social work has long stressed social justice, and in recent years has incorporated discussion of human rights, human need has long been both a neglected and contested concept. In recent years, however, the explicit use of human needs theory has begun to have a significant influence on the literature in social work.

Keywords

human need; human needs; basic needs; fundamental needs; universal needs; human rights; social justice; injustice; needs assessment; empowerment; well-being; quality of life

Introduction

As a profession rooted in an interdisciplinary knowledge base, social work has long used human needs as an implicit concept. However, not until the 20th Edition of the Encyclopedia of Social Work was there an overview of human needs (Dover & Joseph, 2008). The goal of this entirely new entry is to present the first comprehensive review of the literature on human needs for use in social work. Each of the 2008 sections is retained, but the content is updated and substantially expanded. For further references to these and other theories of human need, please see the Oxford Bibliographies Online: Social Work entry on human needs (Dover, 2010a).


The Theories of Human Need section of the previous entry discussed the hierarchical human needs theory of Abraham Maslow (1943, 1971). In this entry Maslow’s work is drawn on primarily in order to demonstrate the impact of his work on the current theories of human need, including the theory of human need (THN) and its central concepts of health and autonomy (Len Doyal & Gough, 1984, 1991), and self-determination theory (SDT), a psychological theory of human needs, and its central concepts of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2011). The TIME model of Jani and Reisch (2011) is discussed below in the section on Social Work Practice and the work of James Ife (2013) on human rights and human needs is in the section on Needs, Rights, and Justice. The section ends with...
discussion of a number of unresolved conceptual issues for use of human needs theory in social work.

The section on Social Work Education fully reviews the early attention to need in social work education and the subsequent neglect of the concept. For Social Welfare Policy, Dean’s *Understanding Human Needs* (2010) has summarized the social policy analysis value of THN, which has more recently been used in considerable recent social policy research related to global social justice and social sustainability, summarized below.

The section on Social Work Practice discusses recent contributions to the social work literature (Jani & Reisch, 2011), recent philosophical contributions relevant to social work practice (Brock, 2009; S. C. Miller, 2012) and recent uses of THN in the social work practice literature (Dover, 2009b; O’Brien, 2010).

For Social Research, the current entry updates the status of research based on THN, as well as the substantial research drawing on SDT, a psychological theory of human need which is now being more widely used in social work. For the section on Social and Political Action, the recognition of universal human needs and their culturally unique expression have been seen as fundamental for an emancipatory social work approach (Mullaly, 2001). But such concepts were also viewed as a hindrance to empowering communities to engage in autonomous needs definition (Ife, 2009).

The Values and Ethics of social work have long incorporated the concept of human need (Boehm, 1958; Reamer, 1993; Timms, 1983), although it was not until 1997 that the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers utilized the concept of human needs (National Association of Social Workers, 1996).

In the Future Trends and Opportunities section, and throughout this entry, questions about needs are raised, in order to produce critical thinking and discussion about the place of human needs theories and concepts in social work ethics, theory and practice.

**History of Theories of Human Need in Social Work**

Human needs concepts have long been central to the assumptions underlying social work practice (Dover & Joseph, 2008; Jani & Reisch, 2011), including the early psychosocial models of practice and in the Life Model of practice (Germain & Gitterman, 2008). From the beginning, needs of individuals were interpreted within the larger social environment (Richmond, 1922). While Robinson took a relativist perspective with respect to need, she anticipated later theories of need via her stress on the worker–client relationship itself (Robinson, 1930). Hamilton also saw psychological needs as culturally relative, and tended to speak about needs in terms of eligibility for services and benefits (G. Hamilton, 1951). Reynolds was critical of overly focusing on relationships and on the expressed service requests (wants) of clients, lest this remove from social workers the need to identify social worker’s responsibility to address the needs of clients (Reynolds, 1934).
Charlotte Towle's Common Human Needs

The first social worker to seriously address the question of human needs was Charlotte Towle, in her book *Common Human Needs* (Towle, 1945). Towle contended that social workers needed to understand the interrelatedness of human needs. She concluded there are universal needs such as food, clothing and housing that are required for physical health and mental health. Towle adopted a hierarchical outlook, in that she viewed so-called dependency needs as prior to achieving the need for independence. She viewed these needs as universal but as developmental, in that they vary in nature at various points in the life cycle.

Towle stressed that working to address human needs one person at a time is not the entire answer. In a talk given in Cleveland, under the joint auspices of the Western Reserve University School of Applied Social Sciences, Towle stated (Towle, 1946, p. 172), “Economic need is both cause and effect of a whole gamut of human ills,” including intellectual, physical, and emotional development.”

As discussed extensively by Posner (1995), Towle's work created controversy. What came to be known as the *Common Human Needs* controversy began with a Baltimore civic committee report in late 1947, leading to press criticism of malingerers and the spread of local investigations into public welfare systems in many other cities. According to Posner (1995), the civic committee report specifically criticized this statement (Towle, 1945, p. 57): “Social security and public assistance programs are a basic essential for attainment of the socialized state envisaged in democratic ideology, a way of life which so far has been realized only in slight measure” (present emphasis).

Soon Congressional criticism included Towle’s use of the words *socialized state*. Following the re-election of President Truman in 1948, the American Medical Association publicly criticized the Towle book as part of a strong campaign to prevent the adoption of socialized medicine. According to Posner (1995), in August 1951, *Nation's Business* published an article which singled out the above quoted line from *Common Human Needs*. The resulting outcry led to renewed Congressional concerns, and eventually to the destructions of the plates to the book by the federal Bureau of Public Assistance. Although the book was soon re-published in revised edition by the American Association of Social Workers in 1952 and by N.A.S.W. in 1957 (Towle, 1957), with editorial changes introduced by the author, the controversial sentence was omitted.

The work on human needs of David Gil

In the decades since that time of controversy over human needs, David Gil has been the only well-known and consistent proponent of the centrality of human needs theory for social work. Gil identified a hierarchical set human needs that included meaningful human relationships; meaningful work (including creative activity); a sense of security based on fulfilling work and relationships; self-actualization (Maslow, 1970); and spiritual needs (Gil, 1992, 2004). Gil
analyzed social welfare policy on the basis of its contribution to addressing human needs (1992), and concluded that human needs must be addressed in order to achieve social justice (2004). In the five editions of Unravelling Social Policy, Gil pioneered proposals for making analysis of human needs central to social policy (1992).

According to Gil, all human societies throughout history have experienced a wide range of biologically and socially shaped needs. These include food, shelter, clothing; health, education, work, recreation; creativity, recognition, communication, self-expression, and human relations. Needs experienced in the context of relative scarcities and the pursuit of provisions to satisfy these needs are a major source of the evolution of human social orders (Gil, 1976).

In his later work, Gil (1984) identified several intrinsic and existential human needs, including (1) regular access to life sustaining and enhancing goods and services, (2) meaningful social relations and a sense of belonging to a community involving mutual respect, acceptance, affirmation, care and love, (3) meaningful and creative participation in accordance with one's innate capacities and stage of development in productive processes of one's community and society, (4) a sense of security, derived from continuous fulfillment of needs for life-sustaining and enhancing goods and services, meaningful relations, and meaningful participation in socially valued productive processes, and (5) becoming all that one is capable of becoming or, in Maslow's terms, self-actualization through creative, productive work. Gil further stated that the extent to which these basic needs are capable of being realized depends upon the structures, dynamics, and values of the social order, specifically, the manner in which: “means of production are controlled, used, and developed and conserved; work and production are organized, goods and services are exchanged and distributed; and social, civil and political rights are distributed” (p. 26).

More recently, Gil has also argued that human needs concepts are essential to understanding the meaning of social justice (Gil, 2004). Gil viewed human needs as including the following interrelated dimensions: (1) social/psychological needs for meaningful human relationships of the I-Thou type (1937), (2) productive/creative needs such as meaningful work, (3) security needs derived from trust that the above meets have been met, (4) self-actualization needs, citing Maslow's updated edition (1970), and (5) spiritual needs, related to gleaning meaning from human existence in an unfathomable cosmos (2004).

In his most recent work, Gil (2013) emphasized that people and communities actively address their needs in ways that depend upon their social circumstances. However, in doing so they often face systems of oppression rooted in exploitation. These systems rely upon socially-structured violence to maintain systems of economic and social privilege. Since Wilensky and Lebeaux's early contention that advanced social welfare systems required an integrative view of human needs (Wilensky & Lebeaux, 1958), Gil's work has been the primary expression of human needs theory within the field of social work. Throughout his work, Gil championed human needs and opposed all forms of oppression (Gil, 2013). In receiving the Noam Chomsky Award from the Justice Studies Association, Gil's (2008) presentation focused on the centrality
of addressing human needs for individual and social development and for the pursuit of global social justice.

Needs Theory in Social Work's Interdisciplinary Foundation

As a profession, social work draws on an interdisciplinary intellectual and research foundation. Our profession responds to the voices of clients and communities who are addressing and articulating their needs. We also engage in active needs assessment, although we often fail to distinguish between service needs and human needs and fail to recognize human capabilities (McKnight, 1989). We draw upon theoretical work and research findings from science, social science and the humanities.

In philosophy, ever since the classical period, philosophers have considered human needs to be an essential part of human nature (Thomson, 1987). However, McCloskey (1976) concluded that there had been little explicit philosophical discussion of human need. The notable exceptions were Fromm and Marx (1966), Braybrooke (1968), and Bradshaw (1972). Bradshaw (1972) identified expert-defined normative needs, subjective or felt needs, expressed needs (demands), and comparative need (relative to the needs experienced by others). Heller (1976); Soper (1981), and Springborg (1981) issued work on human need which sought to explore Marxist conceptions of human need.

David Wiggins (1998[1987]), a major contemporary philosopher, further clarified the distinction between wants and needs, distinguished absolute from instrumental needs, and demonstrated that at the individual and community levels, there are objective, identifiable, non-circumstantial necessary conditions which are required in order to avoid serious harm. Wiggins also criticized theories of justice that don’t incorporate a conception of need (2005).

Following the issuance of the book-length THN (Len Doyal & Gough, 1991), the discourse grew (Brock, 1994, 1997), with important additional work appearing in the next decade (Reader, 2005; Wiggins, 2005, 2006). Soon there was an acceleration of contributions about human needs within philosophy (Assiter & Noonan, 2007; Brock; S. C. Miller, 2012; Noonan, 2006, 2012; Reader, 2011), with well over a third of all citations of Doyal and Gough (1991) coming since 2007. As recently noted by Noonan (Noonan, 2014), there is an often ignored but “increasingly extensive and sophisticated social philosophical literature concerned with needs as a unified basis of a critique of capitalism and a rich account of human flourishing.” Philosophical discussion of human needs has now been termed ubiquitous (Schuppert, 2013). There are now even Foucauldian contributions on the subject (L. A. Hamilton, 2013).

Within sociology, the trend has been to underemphasize “trans-historical and universal questions” about human nature, in favor of examination of the socially structured nature of social problems (Wrong, 1961). Etzioni (1968) responded by proposing that human needs theory might correct for Wrong’s concern about sociology’s over-socialized theorization of humankind. House and Mortimer (1990) called for enhanced examination of endogenous attributes such as human nature and human needs, with care being taken to avoid reductionist biological explanations for social phenomena. Sociologist and gerontologist Carroll Estes (2008) has since
explicitly endorsed THN, concluding that it is necessary to view human needs as objective, universal and transcultural.

In economics, according to Gasper (2009), the concept of human need was found in the early literature on welfare economics (Pigou, 1920) and in recent humanistic economics (Lutz & Lux, 1988). A quest for interdisciplinary understanding of human needs within the context of the central preoccupations of economics as a discipline marked the earlier and later life work of two of the giants of institutional economics, Carl Menger and K. William Kapp. In both cases, their work in that regard was not fully appreciated during their lifetimes, nor was it widely known in the English-speaking world until very recently. Recent archival research (Becchio, 2010) recognized that Menger's Principles of Economics (1981[1871]) concluded that the nature of economic goods can't be fully appreciated except with reference to the physiological and psychological study of human needs. Known for his work on the externalization of the social costs of business enterprise (Kapp, 1950), Kapp (2011) called for the “re-introduction of human needs into economics,” and for the establishment of a social welfare minimum oriented explicitly to satisfying existential human needs. Kapp argued that reducing economic activity to monetary calculations risks the “degeneration and disintegration of the human natural and social environment as well as threats to human existence due to a neglect of substantive human needs” (p. 86). More recently, Williams (2012) has provided a valuable overview of the usage of the concept of needs within economics.

In political science, there has been increased attention to human needs theory in recent years, including use of THN to discuss needs-based human rights as the foundation for a just securitization theory of international relations (Floyd, 2011; D. Miller, 2012). Frohlich and Oppenheimer (1992) pioneered the use of thought experiments on human preferences for various policy options related to human needs. These were later used in Brock's (2009) work on global social justice. Oppenheimer (2011, 2012) reported empirical results indicating that when justice is conceptualized as fairness that is not unduly biased towards concerns for self-interest, and when respondents are of the understanding they will have the liberty to implement their preferred arrangement, there are universally similar understandings of social justice as a combination of concerns for need, efficiency, and just deserts. Hamilton's The Political Philosophy of Needs (L. A. Hamilton, 2003) proposed a non-universal typology, which included: (1) vital needs, which are both drives and goals, (2) particular social needs, which are manifestations of patterns of consumption and production and are the focus of individual demands, and (3) agency needs, which are the objectives of organized social groups.

In anthropology, some work has stressed the objective universality of human rights and other value systems (Brown, 1991; Renteln, 1990), while other work has sought a middle ground between universalism and cultural relativism (Cohen, 1989). However, Rist (1980) had earlier critiqued the human needs approach to global social policy, and stressed the value of localized quality of life research that could prevent external elites from prescribing local needs, a concern shared by Ife (2009).

Within psychology, it was only recently that a chapter on human needs appeared in a major
handbook or annual review in the field of social psychology (Pittman & Ziegler, 2007). SDT succeeds a long tradition of early psychological contributions to human needs theory, outlined in Oxford Bibliographies Online (Dover, 2010a). As of the early 1940s, two incipient theories of human need had arisen. Murray (1938) drew on research with male college students to distinguish between manifest and latent needs linked to drives for achievement, affiliation, and power. Maslow (1943) moved beyond lists of needs and proposed a hierarchical human needs theory, which posited that physiological and safety needs needed to be addressed prior to fulfilling needs such as belonging/love and self-actualization. Maslow (1971) later revised his hierarchy of needs to include self-transcendence, according to Koltko-Rivera (2006). Maslow (1943) made clear that although he viewed his theory as universal, there were culturally varying preferences for how to address needs.

Theories of Human Need

Since the 2008 entry, there has been a significant increase in the use of human needs theory within social work. Four significant theoretical frameworks are discussed extensively in this entry (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Len Doyal & Gough, 1991; Ife, 2013; Jani & Reisch, 2011). The two formal theories, the theory of human need (THN) of Doyal and Gough and the self-determination theory (SDT) of Deci and Ryan, are discussed here. Due to its significance for social work thinking about human rights and human needs, the work of Ife is discussed in the section on Needs, Rights and Justice, later in this entry. Due to its relevance for social work practice, the transformational integrative multidimensional evolutionary (TIME) model of Jani and Reisch (2011) are discussed below in the section on Social Work Practice.

Recently, there has been considerable recent use of such theories in social work (Blakey, 2012), particularly in child welfare (Axford, 2009; O'Brien, 2010). There have also been new theoretical developments within the profession (Bonnycastle, 2011; Connolly & Ward, 2008; Jani & Reisch, 2011). Given this increased attention to human needs theory, it is important to fully summarize THN and SDT.

Theory of Human Need of Doyal and Gough (THN)

The THN of the philosopher Doyal and political economist Gough was the first formal, philosophically constructed theory of human needs to be presented at book length. According to the theory, there is a hierarchical relationship between certain fundamental societal conditions, culturally specific satisfiers, intermediate needs, and two basic needs (health and autonomy), which are seen as necessary for avoiding serious harm while engaging in social participation that is not unduly restricted. For an accessible chart of this hierarchical relationship, please see the electronically available article by Gough (2014b).

Amongst the universal social conditions required for addressing basic needs are these social systems: production, reproduction, cultural transmission and political authority. This aspect of the theory built on Rawls's original position and its specification of various specific democratic rights seen as logically necessary for protection against harm, given the distinct possibility, under
the veil of ignorance, that one might need such rights (Rawls, 1971).

These conditions permit access to a range of specific satisfiers, consisting of culturally and environmentally varying ways of achieving at least a minimally optimal level of these intermediate needs: adequately nutritional food and water, adequate housing, non-hazardous work and physical environments, appropriate health care, security in childhood, significant primary relationships; economic security; safe birth control and child-bearing, and basic education (Len Doyal & Gough, 1991; Gough, 2000). Those intermediate needs must be satisfied at a minimally optimal level in order to meet two primary basic needs, physical health and autonomy of agency. In turn, these two needs must be met in order to avoid serious harm and engage in social participation (Len Doyal, 1998; Len Doyal & Gough, 1991).

Autonomy of agency is viewed as a construct involving mental health, cognitive non-deprivation, and relatively unrestricted opportunities for choice, without which social participation is significantly restricted, thus making avoidance of serious harm less likely. Careful attention was given in the construction of this concept of autonomy of agency to avoiding ableist assumptions as well as conceptualizations of autonomy that see agency as individualist rather than interdependent and collective pursuits. Doyal (1998) clarified that there are three measurable variables related to the achievement of autonomy: adequate information and understanding about one's environment, achieved via cultural transmission and education of some kind; psychological capacity rooted in rationality and emotionality, and existent opportunities for exercising autonomy.

When health and autonomy needs are together met, presumably in varying degree of fulfillment of health and autonomy needs, those individuals and communities whose needs are satisfied may reach the universal goal of avoidance of serious harm. However, this is perhaps the most dismal component of the Doyal-Gough theory; in that it appears to view the goals of humankind as reduced to avoiding harm and engaging in rather basic levels of social participation.

However, the Doyal-Gough theory overview also has a vertically parallel "right-hand" track, which portrays the path to human liberation, which is defined as critical participation in a chosen form of life. This requires both health and critical autonomy, not merely health and basic autonomy. The foundation for critical autonomy is in enhanced societal preconditions. In addition to a social system of political authority, there must be a social system which involves actual political participation, not merely a minimally participatory system of governance/social control. Furthermore, while there must be social systems of production, reproduction, and cultural transmission from generation to generation, there are additional preconditions for optimization of the societal preconditions for need satisfaction. These include enhanced societal preconditions for optimization such as negative freedoms (civil-political rights) and positive freedoms (such as established human rights to effective need satisfiers.)

Based on this enhanced set of societal preconditions, an enhanced set of specific satisfiers produces more than a minimally optimal level of intermediate need satisfaction, in a way which produces a truly optimum level of basic need satisfaction, one characterized not merely by health
and autonomy but by health and critical autonomy. Notably, one unique requirement for critical autonomy is not only a system of cultural transmission within a particular society but access to cross-cultural knowledge of alternative ways of life. Without knowledge of a variety of such alternatives, as opposed to those passed down via cultural transmission from within one's society, critical autonomy can't be achieved. However, achievement of basic levels of health and autonomy are seen as necessary for achieving such a critical social construction of how to engage in critical participation in one's chosen form of life.

Doyal and Gough (1991) viewed their theory as both a theory of universal human need and of culturally determined satisfiers. Doyal and Gough (1991, p. 168) pointed out that their theory is iterative. In other words, it posits the existence of universal and objective needs but also the need for ongoing growth of our understanding of how intermediate needs are best satisfied. This process involves experientially-grounded knowledge that is actively codified in terms of its meaning and implications both for local communities and for social policy. This is seen as central to the culturally and environmentally specific satisfiers that are at the root of their theory.

Among critiques of THN, Drover and Kerans (1993) contended that needs definitions are not thin, but thick. As such, they are appropriately defined not by any theory, but by social movements rooted in subjectively articulated claims, although such movements might ultimately articulate universalizable definitions of what are considered our true needs. In a later critique (Tao & Drover, 1997), THN was supported but found over-dependent upon a Western concept of autonomy and under-appreciative of social obligation. Others drew on THN, but have sought to incorporate emerging conceptualizations of caring and obligation (S. C. Miller, 2012) or of interdependency (Dean, 2009) into theory of human need.

Noonan (2012) critiqued THN and other needs theorists if and when they prioritize universal, organic life requirements for survival over more comprehensive concepts of need. In doing so, they confine the conceptualization of social justice to those needs which could conceivably be met within the existing structures of capitalism. A similar critique of THN was made by Schuppert (2013), namely that Doyal and Gough overstate the role of needs as opposed to other interests, within the realm of the justification for rights.

Self-Determination Theory of Deci and Ryan

Self-determination theory (SDT) is an influential psychological theory of human needs. It is rooted in the humanistic tradition but spans developmental, personality, social and cognitive psychology. The theory has been applied to practice at both the micro and macro levels and is supported by a large and growing body of empirical research. SDT utilizes the concept of eudaimonia (self-realization), positing that needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy must be satisfied in order to achieve three things: (1) psychological growth (related to the expression of autonomous motivation), (2) human integrity (which varies in nature due to the culturally specific assimilation and internalization of culturally specific practices), and (3) well-being (measured in terms of psychological health and life satisfaction). Their approach utilizes various established measures of hedonic well-being, primarily those associated with the vast
literature on subjective well-being (SWB). However, SDT sees them as outcome measures for well-being, the achievement of which rests upon the satisfaction of basic psychological needs.

A unifying factor in the theory is human motivation, differentiated into a typology of autonomous and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation is linked to human activity that is valued and volitional, rather than controlled motivation, which corresponds to activity that is required or coerced in nature. Intrinsic motivation, the topic of Deci’s first book (Deci, 1975), is consistent with the concept of autonomous motivation found in SDT. Nix, Ryan, Manly and Deci (1999) said that SDT explains the locus of causality of human behavior by utilizing the concepts of autonomous motivation (which involves personally exercised agency) and controlled motivation (which involves being pressured or coerced by both interpersonal and intrapersonal forces).

However, Deci recently explained in an accessible lecture that some extrinsic motivation is not inconsistent with autonomous motivation. Social learning within diverse cultures can lead to an internalization process over the life course, thus producing an intrinsic motivation for the associated behavior (Deci, 2012). More precisely, intrinsically motivated behavior is considered autonomously motivated by SDT. Paraphrasing Deci and Ryan (1985), Nix, Ryan, Manly and Deci (1999, p. 272) stated: “To the extent that an extrinsic motivation has been fully integrated and thus is self-endorsed, it assumes an internal perceived locus of causality and is autonomous. On the other hand, to the extent that an extrinsic motivation has not been integrated to the self, it retains an external perceived locus of causality and is controlled.”

This revision of the previously established typology of motivation as being intrinsic or extrinsic is the foundation of self-determination theory. The aspect of SDT that concerns us here is its theory of fundamental psychological needs. The first is a need to feel competent about life tasks, without which negative self-evaluation can develop. Lack of perceived competence has been found to produce poor psychological outcomes across human cultures. The second is a need for relatedness, which when not fulfilled also produces psychological pain. Finally, people have a psychological need for autonomous, self-regulated individual activity.

Just as activity originating in controlled motivation can potentially be internalized into one's set of intrinsically motivated behaviors, autonomously motivated activity that receives regular external reinforcements can lead to diminished autonomous motivation to continue that behavior and its externalization to the status of a controlled motivational activity (Deci, 2012). Apparently, people have a need to go to the well of autonomous motivation to draw on nourishment for the behavior which is most valued. That behavior is associated with those life tasks which address their basic psychological needs. These findings are consistent with SDT theory's prioritization of autonomous, self-regulated activity as a basic need.

Comparing SDT and THN

There are several points of compatibility between SDT and THN. For THN, significant primarily relationships are an intermediate need, a prerequisite for achieving autonomy, while for
SDT relatedness is a basic need. Thus, relationships, a fundamental value for social work, are central to both theories.

The basic compatibility of SDT and THN has been commented upon by the developers of each theory. The work of Ryan and Sapp (2007) made clear that both theories posit an objective basis for the identified needs. These needs are generalizable across cultures, but are addressed in each culture in distinct manners. This is consistent with the theory’s reliance upon autonomy as a fundamental requirement for human growth and actualization. The theory recognizes the needs for multiple sources of the nourishment required for humans to thrive and to avoid deterioration of health. With respect to needs being objective, Ryan and Sapp (2007) pointed out that people are often not subjectively aware of their needs.

Gough (2004, p. 303) commented that the parallels between SDT and THN are clear. They include the shared use of autonomy, including a view of autonomy that refers not to independence or a lack of interdependence, but rather to “self-regulation and volition, the recognition that acts are undertaken by you, not done to you.” According to Gough (2004), SDT builds on Maslow and Fromm to provide a psychological theory of eudaimonic well-being, and SDT’s three basic universal psychological needs provide a foundation for more detailed study of human actions by hedonic psychology.

In other words, SDT provides a way of distinguishing behavior oriented to human wants and desires which are or are not directed towards addressing basis needs, or which involve what might be considered their over-satisfaction. Moreover, as Gough (2004) has pointed out, THN extensively discussed several concepts, including cultural understanding, self-esteem, and cognitive skills, which are consistent with the centrality of competence in SDT (Len Doyal & Gough, 1991).

Camfield and Skevington (2008) have thoroughly compared the two theories. They pointed out that both THN and SDT utilize the concept of eudaimonism, seen as the integration and realization of actualized potential. Also, both theories are centered on autonomy, thus providing a conceptual bridge between them. Earlier, Camfield and Skevington (2002) pointed out that the concept of autonomy is reinforced by several decades of research on the concepts of choice, control and mastery and their relationship. As may be apparent, findings related to choice are relevant to the volitional foundation of the concepts of autonomy used in SDT, and the concepts of control and mastery are related to the role of competence in SDT.

Particularly relevant for social work, both SDT and THN stress the central importance of human relationships. For SDT, relatedness is one of three basic psychological needs, and is correlated with the need for autonomy. The root of such relatedness is relationship. SDT drew on Baumeister and Leary’s concept of persistent caring relationships (1995). For THN, the concept parallel to relatedness is significant primary relationships. Such relationships are among a number of intermediate needs (including food, water, etc.) that are prerequisites to two basic needs, health and autonomy (Len Doyal & Gough, 1991).
According to Richard Ryan, co-developer of SDT, and Aislinn Sapp (2007), the conditions which support rather than detract from the ability to achieve autonomy also contribute to addressing competence and relatedness. Autonomy, relatedness and competence are three interdependent necessities. Ryan and Sapp also agreed with the stress on autonomy of THN (2007). Autonomy is seen in both theories not as part of a Western, individualist notion of human independence, but in terms of self-regulated participation in an interdependent process (Gough, 2004). As such, autonomy is posited by SDT as a requirement for the full realization of human potential and by THN as essential to individuals and collectively for avoiding serious harm and optimizing social participation.

One other way in which SDT and THN are seen as convergent is that the central concept of competence in SDT is consistent with basic elements of THN. This includes cognitive skills, cultural understanding, self-esteem, and critical autonomy, all of which THN sees as required for full participation in one's chosen way of life (Gough, 2004).

For both SDT and THN, the satisfaction of basic human needs is necessary for the ability of people and communities to avoid serious harm. No matter how one views human subjective well-being from the standpoint of a particular culture, such harm avoidance requires relatively unhindered social participation, and human flourishing requires a more optimal level of such participation.

Finally, SDT and THN both claim to constitute universal theories of human need that are also relevant cross-culturally. They do not claim that needs are perceived and addressed identically in each culture. However, both theories claim that the basic requirements for human flourishing and avoidance of harm require similar thresholds of psychological, physiological and environment inputs. These inputs are harnessed in myriad ways in our diverse cultures. However, they are seen by SDT and THN as demonstrably related to conceptually bounded and distinct sets of universal human needs, with THN constructed according to philosophical principles (THN) and SDT evolving from decades of psychological theorization and research (SDT).

**Conceptual Issues for Social Work's Use of Human Needs Theory**

Complex and confusing conceptual problems were found with early human needs theory (Kahn, 1957). Instead, social work relied on Lewin's field theory and general systems theory as the cornerstones of social work education's ecosystems perspective (Hearn, 1979; Lewin, 1947), despite Maslow's specific warning that field theory should not be a substitute for needs theory (Maslow, 1943). With respect to human needs, social work had what has been deemed a conceptual problem to solve (Laudan, 1977; Tucker, 1994). Conceptual problems involve theoretical issues, which may be solved either by meta-theoretical discussion or by providing well-constructed conceptual definitions of abstract concepts. These concepts can then be operationalized and utilized both to solve empirical problems and to shed light on the overarching conceptual problems themselves (Dover, 2010b). This section will summarize several conceptual problems, identifying readings for further consultation, but not seeking to
fully discuss recent efforts to resolve them.

Human needs and human well-being

Well-being as a concept has gained in political and policy importance in recent years (Taylor, 2011). Taylor's concern (2011) was that the focus can tilt towards a narrow view of individual well-being or SWB, rather than a balanced approach to understanding well-being in terms of both objective circumstances and subjective perceptions, as proposed by Gough, McGregor and Camfield (2007).

Human needs and quality of life

In comparing human well-being (1992) to quality of life (QoL), Camfield and Skevington (2008) began by acknowledging the objective and subjective aspects of each. The authors concluded that based upon research findings, subjective well-being (SWB) and subjective QoL are really synonymous. However, the authors differed on whether SWB research is increasingly superfluous, given the quest to better theorize the multidimensional nature of QoL.

Human needs and human spirituality

For both SDT and THN, it appears unclear how their theory accounts for spiritual needs. After all, religious and spiritual practices are important for conceptions of human need (Canda, 2008), and this can be observed across many cultures. The stress of THN and SDT on intrinsically important human relationships in addressing human needs provides an avenue for fuller exploration of the place of spiritual needs within human needs theory.

Here, Gil's identification of social/psychological needs for human relationships of the I-Thou type may be significant (Gil, 2004). In a chapter on human needs, Heschel (1965) stressed the centrality of being needed, and saw the meaning of human existence as linked to face to face interaction that responds to people's needs. For Lévinas, a transcendent, intersubjective asymmetrical responsibility is exercised in the temporal dimension. This involves responsibility for both the proximal and distal other. It also involves multiple third parties who witness the dialogical exchange (Bergo, 2011).

Similar observations can be gleaned from Christian social teaching. For Christian social ethics, there is a similar need to respond to the call of others, both literally and conceptually. The starting point is “to pay close attention to what is going on in our lives and the lives of those around us” (Connors & McCormick, 1998). Applied to the consideration of Catholic social policy, these principles have a number of implications and involve a number of additional principles (Corbin, 1989). According to a these perspectives, there is theoretical value in a broad definition of fulfilling human relationships. Such relationships are also found within the framework of the practice of religious rituals which have been found to be fundamental in the evolution of human culture (Rappaport, 1999). The nature of those relationships is
conceptualized differently in the different religious traditions. However, one ethic of reciprocity and responsibility can be found in nearly all world religions. The Golden Rule is a conception of human responsibility which discourages the inflicting of harm (Wattles, 1996).

Needs, wants and desires

Needs are not the same as preferences (Gough & Thomas, 1994). One recent effort to compare needs and wants (Gasper, 2004) saw three modes of contrasts, in which the meaning of wants was consistent (wishes, desires, and impulses). THN’s positing of health and autonomy as basic needs is based on Braybrooke’s relational formula (1987). A relational formula refers to needing something as a prerequisite process to achieving or accessing something else. In other words, according to Gasper, THN didn’t seek to identify allegedly universal forms of human behavior or merely develop a list of needs. Instead of viewing needs as nouns, Doyal and Gough (1991) saw needs in terms of verbs, with a view to identifying needing as a process.

Seen this way, health and autonomy are practiced and exercised in order to avoid harm and to engage in social participation, broadly construed. This doesn’t mean to imply that people are oriented subjectively to meeting their needs, as opposed to pursuing their desires, which may or may not be related to their objective needs. In fact, one of the books on needs was titled Let Needs Diminish So That Preferences May Flourish (Braybrooke, 1968). Braybrooke (1968) distinguished between course-of-life needs (fundamental and universal needs) and adventitious needs, which he saw as culturally and situationally variant.

Gasper (2004) parsed culturally relative notions of needs as wants and universally relevant determinations regarding intermediate needs, regardless of how they are addressed differentially in various cultures. This set the stage for use of needs theory in advocating for needs-based prescriptions for social policy that are not reduced to the basic materials needs (BMN) approach of the 1970s (Wisner, 1988).

Others who have discussed needs in relation to wants and desires are Bay (1968); Macpherson (1977); Marx (1933), and Noonan (2006, 2012). Miller (2012) recognized the importance of distinguishing needs from desires, and provided an important example of an anomaly to her overall assertion that fundamental needs normally have more moral import than desires (p. 23). She gave the example of a dying child with a last wish which involve the expenditure of resources which might have been used to extend life, such as a long wished-for family vacation. Frankfurt (1998, p. 19) also warned against “exaggerating the inherent superiority of claims grounded in needs over claims grounded in desires.” Like Miller (2012), he provided the example of a dying or seriously ill person’s wishes.

Postmodernist Critiques

The advent of postmodernist critiques of theories of human need require social work attention to their implications, including their contribution to the distinctions between needs and desires. In addition to the critique of Jani and Reisch (2011), and the work of James Ife (2013), the work of
Lévinas (Lévinas & Robbins, 2001) has been drawn on by social work critics of overreliance on needs theory and other pre-conceived theorizations (Ben-Ari & Strier, 2010; Rossiter, 2011).

Ben-Ari and Strier (2010, p. 2161) contended: “Many of the modern social sciences reduce the experience of the ‘Other’ into the notion of need, ignoring the distinction between totality and infinity and need and desire.” Rossiter (2011, p. 986) warned: “Professions are legitimated through the possession and exercise of special knowledge and this knowledge is associated with power and privilege.” Rossiter (2011) proposed Lévinisian ethics, rooted in reflective and reflexive practice, as one way to avoid unduly imposing our own conceptions on those with whom we work. But Ben-Ari and Strier as well as Rossiter, respectively, recognized that prioritizing ethics before knowledge is also related to our responsibility to oppose oppression and to work for social justice. This recognition prompted them to recognize an ethical responsibility to transform how we conceptualize justice (Rossiter, 2011) and how we conceive cultural competence (Ben-Ari and Strier, 2010).

Michael Ignatieff (1986), in *The Needs of Strangers*, questioned whether food, shelter, clothing, warmth and medical care are all that people need, and asked if there is a difference between what people need to survive and to thrive. Ignatieff warned (1986, p. 11), “There are few presumptions in human relations more dangerous than the idea that one knows what another human being needs better than they do themselves.” This is a central postmodernist concern, although Ignatieff wasn’t writing from an explicit postmodernist perspective.

**Needs as universal or relative**

The stress of Murray and Maslow on the universality of human needs prompted Dorothy Lee (1948) to argue that each culture defines itself based upon its own expressed values. Culture was not a response to the social needs of society but rather an expression of the basic values of society. Lee’s critique helped to define the dialogues about universal and relative human need still prevailing today. Lee criticized hierarchies of need and contended that needs were unique within different societies (D. Lee, 1948, 1959).

Boehm argued that human needs were both universal and culturally specific, but concluded that social work’s focus should be on human social functioning and societal resource distribution (Boehm, 1958). Addressing similar concerns, Jani and Reisch (2011) situated Towle’s work within emerging human behavior theory. They noted that Towle recognized both universal needs and the contextually specific ways in which they are addressed, but contended that that recognition was often obscured during later developments in social work, which often assumed needs were purely universal (Towle, 1945).

Noonan (2012) distinguished between objective organic life requirements and more comprehensive conceptualizations of need, although staking a claim that both can be defended as universal. Schuppert (2013), however, in distinguishing between minimum agency and THN’s concept of autonomy, and between absolutely necessary goods and more general interests, restricted his assertion of universality to the more restricted conceptualizations. As debates
continue about whether needs are universal or relative, the trends appears to be oriented to more precise definitions of the nature of the concepts utilized.

Needs and harm

Rawl's (1971) original position, which was characterized by a veil of ignorance about the nature of the rights required for the avoidance of harm, was used by Doyal and Gough (1991) in the philosophical construction of their theory regarding the nature of the societal preconditions for satisfying intermediate needs. The concept of harm is central to the moral significance of theories of human need. For example, Wiggins (1998[1987]) concluded that it is possible to identify objective, non-circumstantial conditions which are necessary in order to avoid serious harm.

In The Ethics of Need: Agency, Dignity and Obligation, Sarah Clark Miller (2012) acknowledged the identification by Doyal and Gough (1991) of the centrality of serious harm, and indicated their approaches were not contrary to her own. Doyal (1998) made clear that the physical, mental and emotional abilities supplied when health and autonomy needs are met are utilized to avoid harm and engage in social participation. He specified that cognitive capacity and emotionality were both components of the psychological capacity component of autonomy, namely mental health broadly considered. The loss of autonomy under THN was clearly associated with mental and emotional elements of psychiatric illness. However, despite its recognition of the role of interdependence, rationality and choice were more central to THN's conception of autonomy than the capacity for caring and emotional connections.

Miller (2012) gave more specific content to the concept of harm, by identifying the serious harm of compromised agency. Miller reasoned that when needs are denied, compromised agency is the outcome. This imposes an obligation on moral agents to respond by advancing the self-determination of persons experiencing this. For Miller, agency involved a caring component, one motivated by emotional connections. People draw on rationality, emotionality and relationality to cultivate, maintain or restore agency. As such, Miller's contribution can deepen one aspect of the conceptualization of autonomy as used in THN.

Needs and strengths/deficits

In an influential book, The Careless Society: Community and its Counterfeits, John McKnight (1995, p. 43) critiqued what he called “professionalized assumptions regarding need.” He was concerned that needs are often translated into deficiencies. He wasn’t opposed to discourse on needs, but how the discourse has evolved. He pointed out (p. 43): “A need could be understood as a condition, a want, a right, an obligation of another, an illusion, or an unresolvable problem. Professional practice consistently defines a need as an unfortunate absence or emptiness in another.” Unfortunately, the focus on service providers on our own needs, and confusion between service needs and human needs has arisen (McKnight, 1989). McKnight instead suggested a focus on assets of people and communities.
The strengths perspective sought to avoid stigmatizing clients as needy, as this could disempower the people and communities with whom we work (Saleebey, 2006). Arguably, however, the strengths perspective's focus on human capabilities is fully consistent with the use of the capabilities concept in human needs theory (Alkire, 2005; Gough, 2004; Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1985), as well as with the central premises of THN and SDT.

For instance, Lee, Zaharlick and Akers (2011) drew on both the strengths perspective and on SDT to conclude that coping with past trauma is enhanced by purposively identifying and addressing needs and goals as they are relevant to the context of the client’s current life.

Miller (2012) suggested that one reason for the neglect of needs in social theory is a lack of interest in theorizing neediness, dependence and vulnerability. Likewise, O’Neill (2011) has suggested that needs theory is avoided in part because needs are negatively construed as neediness or dependence. He also acknowledged the danger that use of needs theory could lead to a paternalistic approach, if a person’s own view of their needs is not sought. This could lead to what has been termed a dictatorship over needs (Fehér, Heller, & Márkus, 1983). He has furthermore recognized that some bureaucratic provision for human needs can be disempowering and can increase the social distance among people (O’Neill, 2005).

However, O’Neill (2005) also pointed out the potential for forms of collective provision for needs that can enhance social solidarity. Furthermore, O’Neill (2005) stressed the importance of not equating need with humiliation, given the reality that making a needs claim is a fundamental acknowledgement of our dependence on others, or, put another way, on our human interdependence, a key concept for THN. From such a standpoint, acknowledging a need doesn’t amount to ascribing a deficit.

Likewise, the late Soran Reader criticized perspectives that privilege human agential features over our non-agential roles (2007b, p. 582): “For us the term ‘patient’ has misleading associations of human occurrent need, and negative connotations of a state to be avoided.” In philosophical lexicon, people are often patients, namely people who are acted on, as well as agents, who act on others and on our environment. For Reader, this is part of what makes us persons.

The possibility remains that misuse of theories of human need might involve the imposition of disempowering deficit assumptions. But the question remains: do human needs draw out our strengths, both to address our own needs and to exercise our individual and collective responsibilities to care about, care for, and respond to the needs of others?

Needs or capabilities

The relative value of theorizing needs for individuals as opposed to utilizing the concept of capabilities is also major source of conceptual confusion. Both Sen (Sen, 1985, 1999) and Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2000) have used the concept of human capabilities in their work on international social development. According to Gasper (2004), Sen critiqued the basic material
needs approach (BMN) of the 1970s, discussed by Wisner (1988), as being overly concerned with commodities rather than capabilities.

Nussbaum built upon Rawls (1971) and Sen (1985) in order to further theorize a list of universal human capabilities, which she saw as relevant to developing constitutional provisions ensuring these capabilities can be achieved. An earlier working paper comparing the concept of human needs in THN and the theorization of capabilities in (Gough, 2003) has now been updated and published (Gough, 2014a), in a book edited by Comim and Nussbaum (2014). The two theories are seen as addressing a basically similar agenda.

Social Work Education

Early on in the evolution of social work education, content on human needs was seen as central. For instance, an early document of the American Association of Schools of Social Work (1949, p. 2) specified as the first and second objectives of an introductory course in social work: “1. The nature of human needs., 2. The nature of social organization (resources in society to meet the needs)….It is important that students recognize the philosophy of ‘human rights’ under which social work operates.” Herbert Stroup (Stroup, 1953) also contended that the nature of human needs should be one of seven key areas for an introductory course in social work.

Bisno’s book The Philosophy of Social Work strongly emphasized human needs content for social work’s philosophical foundation (1952). Citing Towle (1945), Bisno discussed the "'need' basis of behavior" (p. 17), but stressed that human nature should be seen in a “dynamic rather than a static light” (p. 18). Bisno pointed that social science has historically tended to alternatively stress the primacy of human similarities or human differences, and he contended that social work should recognize both. Bisno argued that while common human needs were widely recognized at that time, people have both shared needs and unique needs and desires. Individual overt behavior was seen as driven by the needs which motivate it as well as being influenced by the social environment.

In yet another important early document for social work education (Boehm, 1956, p. 36), the following explicit point was made, and it is one worthy of citation at length, given its continuing relevance for social work:

Social workers are concerned with meeting basic human needs in the social realm. This concern is viewed not as an end goal of social work but rather as a means to an end. This position is based on the view that the satisfaction of basic human needs is an essential condition for the attainment of human dignity and constitutes a necessary basis for individual self-fulfillment, the goal of social work as well as other professions. The expression of basic human needs and the content of living are culturally conditioned. They vary from society to society, from time to time, and within society may vary from group to group.

Human needs content in social work education, at least as a specified and required aspect of the
curriculum, was disappearing by the 1960s. However, one social policy textbook still widely used until the 1970s contended that functional generalization tied to an integrative view of human needs was a key aspect of an advanced system of social welfare (Wilensky & Lebeaux, 1958). In subsequent years, there were very few voices within The Journal of Social Work Education and The Journal of Teaching in Social Work that gave attention to the implications of human needs for social work education.

An early effort to conceptualize critical social work asked whether institutions are capable of addressing individual’s human needs, and if not, why this is the case (Carniol, 1979). Carniol contended that although conventional approaches to social service delivery often stigmatize clients, critical social work should locate the source of the problems of clients and communities in the failure of economic and social institutions to address human needs, including material, emotional, social and spiritual needs. An early presentation of structural social work (Moreau, 1979, p. 81) contended that economics systems which are oriented primarily to profit distort human relationships by promoting social distance of the kind that reinforces oppression and undermine I–Thou relationships.

Harold Lewis (1981) advocated for a comprehensive curriculum model based on a human needs rubric. Anticipating recent calls for an approach to human needs which breaks down binary distinctions between micro and macro (Jani & Reisch, 2011), Lewis (1981, p. 79) contended that such a rubric would be “based on common human needs that all people evidence in their own persons [including] health, security, justice, knowledge, self-realization, intimacy, and relationships.” His proposed rubric conceived of “person and environment as inseparable: one without the other distorts both.” Discussing a curriculum contribution to content on human needs and social diversity, Blake (1994, p. 131) stressed the educational value of “helping students comprehend that there are attributes and bonds which are common to all people.” Additionally, people may have more things in common with some people than with others, given the nature of social diversity.

The 2004 standards (Council on Social Work Education, 2004[2001]) had focused in the preamble on human well-being, human rights and social and economic justice, as well as referring to the need to “respond to changing human, professional and institutional needs.” The purpose of the social work profession section balanced content on human well-being, opposition to injustice, promotion of justice and the pursuit of policies that “meet human needs and support the development of human capacities.” The foundation program objectives stressed that “social services meet the needs of groups served and are culturally relevant.” The summary of foundation content discussed the integration of “social and economic justice content grounded in an understanding of distributive justice, human and civil rights, and the global interconnections of oppression.” Arguably, there was a balance of content on human needs, human rights and social justice as well as on oppression and injustice.

With the adoption of new competency-based standards (Council on Social Work Education, 2008), the preamble and purpose sections were combined and substantially shortened, with the relevant succeeding statement being:
The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community well-being. Through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons.

Among the values to be conveyed were social justice, human dignity, and human rights, with Educational Policy 2.5 devoted specifically to advancing human rights and social and economic justice. However, the policy was notable for its elimination any reference to the explicit concept of human need. A similar focus continued with the second and third drafts of the proposed 2015 standards, but although the purposes section of the final standards discussed human rights without reference to either human need or social justice, the phrase “of human need” was added to the final version of competency three, so that it read (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 5): “Social workers understand the global interconnections of oppression and human rights violations, and are knowledgeable about theories of human need and social justice and strategies to promote social and economic justice and human rights.” For the first time in the standards of the Council on Social Work Education, both human needs and human rights content was included. Thus, this is the first time that accreditation standards in social work have juxtaposed content on human need, human rights, social justice, and the nature of oppression (Council on Social Work Education, 2015).

Social Welfare Policy

In social work in the United States in recent decades, the primary use of human needs theory in social work policy analysis was the work of Gil (1992). Beginning with Unravelling Social Policy, Gil introduced a widely-used needs-based policy analysis model (Gil, 1984). The concept of human needs had also been used to examine social problems (Herman, 1978), study employment and housing (Mulroy & Ewalt, 1996; Swartz, 1995), and understand the nature of poverty (Spicker, 2007). THN was also beginning to be used in needs assessment research (Percy-Smith, 1996).

Making social benefits a human right was seen as essential for addressing common human needs (Saleebey, 2006), and for building majoritarian coalitions aimed at meeting common human needs (Blau, 1992). Robertson provided a useful overview of how the modern welfare state drew upon human needs concepts in order to counter the influence of market principles in social policy determination (Robertson, 1998). One strengths-based approach to social policy drew on human needs concepts (Chapin, 1995), and such concepts were seen as central to theories of human rights (L. K. Olson, 1982). Mullaly wrote that understanding the culturally specific ways universal human needs are addressed is important to social work’s emancipatory mission (Mullaly, 2001).

More recently, Dean’s Understanding Human Needs (2010) has summarized the social policy analysis value of THN, which has been used in considerable recent social policy research (Lesley Doyal & Doyal, 2013; Guillen-Royo, Velazco, & Camfield, 2013; McGregor, Camfield, &
Increasingly, such research seeks to draw on both THN and the capabilities approach (Alkire, 2005; Nussbaum, 2000), in ways which are increasingly apparent (Gough, 2014a).

One issue was whether or not it was possible to fully address human needs within the context of advanced capitalist economies (Dokecki, 1985; Warshawsky, 1985). Early on, Nixon had argued that there were built-in limitations on meeting human needs under monopoly capitalism (Nixon, 1970). However, others suggested that such an assumption amounted to defeatism with respect to adequately addressing human needs within capitalism and instead called for radical reforms (Dover, 1992b; L. K. Olson, 1982).

The question of whether or not the needs of people and the needs of capital can co-exist within modern industrial democracies is a central one, and was addressed squarely by Ian Gough, co-author of THN. Gough (2000) described the differences between human needs and capital needs, but denied that these needs are impossible to reconcile.

Global Justice Policy

The question of global social justice, and related issues of global environmental sustainability, is increasingly at the center of social policy debates. In Global Justice: A Cosmopolitan Account, Brock (2009) said that in order to examine issues of global justice, it is essential to understand the relationships among three things (needs, entitlements and incentives), which social actors typically seek to harmonize. Drawing on Frolich and Oppenheimer (1992), she reported that when engaged in dialogue about what kinds of social arrangements are most fair and impartial, people sought a social commitment to address basic needs, but one that didn’t undermine various entitlements and rights which didn’t dampen incentives. This demonstrated empirical support for the centrality of human needs, and supported Brock’s contention that political and social arrangements should permit reasonable opportunities to address basic needs. She favored utilizing the various indicators for measuring need-satisfaction proposed by THN, including that of Gough and McGregor (2007), as well other approaches that drew upon THN (Gasper, 2004).

Brock (2009) pointed out that earlier human needs approaches used in the 1970s (Streeten, 1979) had been sidelined by the rise of the capabilities approach (Sen, 1985). Yet Brock recognized that subsequent approaches to the use of human need perspectives aren’t reliant upon use of the capabilities perspective (Reader, 2006). She recognized that needs which matter morally are those which are absolutely necessary (indispensable, inescapable) for human social participation, including the exercise of agency in order to address autonomy needs (Brock, 2009). She concluded that any conceptualization of global justice requires a robust theory of needs that demonstrates what needs are compelling.

Needs and Environmental Sustainability

How can we know whether or not our current levels of need satisfaction are not robbing future generations of their ability to address their human needs? This is a question not just of
measuring and understanding environmental degradation per se, but of understanding how sustainable levels of consumption are over the long term. The sustainability of economic development and the rights of future generations were addressed in *The Theory of Human Need* (1991), not merely as economic questions but as moral concerns. However, they noted counter-intuitive possibilities, namely that higher levels of resource intensive human need satisfaction in the near future might actually result in lower birth rates, thus reducing threats to the capacity to address basic needs in the longer term.

A variety of approaches to human need were drawn on in one significant recent attempt to study the question of sustainability (Rauschmayer, Omann, & Frühmann, 2011). The project commenced what Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef, who has had a longstanding interest in human needs (1992), referred to as an effort to reconstruct the field of economics (Max-Neef, 2011, p. xxi): “The fact that human needs, well-being and quality of life are to become again the fundamental aim of sustainable development is encouraging indeed…. Human needs, capabilities, quality of life and well-being is what people understand.” The work also drew on work by O’Neill (2011), which built on previous work (O'Neill, 2005).

In more recent work, Gough (Gough, 2014b) drew on this work and addressed questions of climate change, from the standpoint of sustainability. Again, counter-intuitive points were made, such as the possibility that people could consume less but have more leisure, thus placing lighter demands on the environment. Gough concluded that THN has value for longitudinal empirical measures of consumption, environmental decline, and levels of human well-being across generations.

**Social Work Practice**

Needs concepts were not a central component of any conceptual model for social work practice until the recent publication of the TIME model of Jani and Reisch (2011). This represented the first full length discussion of human needs and social work practice to appear in a major peer-reviewed journal in social work in recent decades.

Reid warned against a role for social workers in attributing or defining people’s needs as opposed to their acknowledged wants (Reid, 1978). The Life Model included attention to how social worker’s seek to enable goodness of fit between people's needs and their social environment into the method of service being used (Germain & Gitterman, 2008). Goodness-of-fit was seen as taking place between life tasks/needs/goals and stimuli/resources (Germain & Gitterman, 1979), but the model doesn’t fully incorporate any needs concepts.

One motivation for early approaches to culturally informed practice was addressing human needs (Applewhite, 1998; Schiele, 1997). For macro practice, Joseph contended that human needs approaches can inform community organizing and social re-structuring (Joseph, 1986). Shortly after the publication of the Doyal–Gough THN, its value for need-based practice models was stressed (Dover, 1993).
A growing body of literature arising from philosophy makes a number of suggestions which may be of relevance for incorporating needs concepts into social work practice (Brock, 2009; S. C. Miller, 2012; Reader, 2007b). For instance, Brock argued we have a moral responsibility to “enable others to meet their needs themselves”, and in doing so she asked and answered a question that is important for the profession of social work (Brock, 2009, p. 900):

What is it to enable someone to meet a need?...Adequate institutional arrangements to enable people to meet their needs should provide for all the stages involved in enabling. Sometimes we need to focus on the person's capacities, sometimes on the opportunities, external structures, or environment. So, enabling someone to meet her needs through her own actions and choices will involve different things depending on the age and abilities of the person to be enabled.

Recent use of THN and SDT in social work practice literature

Recently, O'Brien (2010) drew on THN to stress that in child welfare practice, needs should be seen both as requisites and as goals that inform both developmental and ecological perspectives. Recognizing the value of theories of universal human need, O'Brien (2010) pointed out the value of identifying additional specific objective health and autonomy needs and need satisfiers, and seeking to understand how those need needs receive subjective interpretation.

Although the origins of SDT was in the 1980s, only in recent years have these theories been widely cited in journals in social work and related fields, such as Administration in Social Work (twice), the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry (at least five times), Children and Youth Services Review and Child Abuse and Neglect (about ten times), and journals in the field of community psychology (at least a dozen times). In Social Work, Williams and Strean (2006) concluded with the following point (p. 183): “We have offered a number of possible theoretical perspectives, including TTM, SDT, and a strengths approach, any one (or more) of which could be used by social workers to help their clients, depending on clinical orientation and specific client need.” In Social Work in Health Care (Thomas, Gray, & McGinty, 2012), a strengths-based approach to the subjective well-being of homeless people utilized both SDT and the theory of human needs of Max-Neef (1991).

Theories of human needs stress not merely the instrumental outcomes of enabling people to meet their needs, but also the needing of relationships themselves. Given that SDT and THN both stress the importance of relationship needs, the provision of relationship was recently stressed, both as part of services provided and incidental to such provision (Dover, 2013). Furthermore, recent conceptualizations of theories of injustice and of cross-cultural practice concluded that recognition of human needs and of the impact of oppression, dehumanization and exploitation on diverse cultures could combine to enhance empathetic understanding (Dover, 2008, 2009b).

The transformational integrative multidimensional evolutionary (TIME) model

Jani & Reisch (2011) have advanced the conceptual debate about the place of human needs
concepts in social work, while also calling for re-examination of the needs and other concepts within prevailing and emerging theories (Reisch & Jani, 2012). Jani and Reisch (2011) devoted a section of their article to the practice implications of their TIME model. They contended social workers should view client behavior as varying within a wide range of normal adaption to a dynamic social environment, thus avoiding static assumptions about individuals and their environments. They encouraged social workers to draw upon the model to engage in critical thinking about the impact of oppression. However, rather than posing the TIME model as a substitute for existing practice approaches, they contended it is a framework for integrating a variety of theoretical perspectives across a range of levels of intervention.

Jani and Reisch's article (2011) was among the very few peer-reviewed journal articles concerned substantially with human needs to appear in a social work journal in recent decades (Blake, 1994; Gil, 2004, 2008). The authors began by contending that despite increased attention to cultural diversity in recent decades, social work's theories of human behavior have not challenged longstanding problematic assumptions about the nature of common human needs. The resulting perceptions of what may be considered normal human behavior have not adequately shifted in response to contemporary developments in the social environment.

They critiqued theoretical frameworks which have focused primarily on individual behavior, and provided examples of how this focus often reflects cultural bias. Drawing on postmodern critical theory, they proposed the more integrated use of sociological and psychological theories, in order to more fully reflect the nature of social environments that evidence the impact of unique historical, structural, cultural and institutional forces. This would permit adapting social interventions to the use of varying theories seen as most applicable in a particular situation. As such, they didn't propose their TIME model as a substitute for all existing theories, but as a way to think critically about existing theoretical frameworks.

First, they discussed the relevance of postmodern critical theory as an alternative to universalist frameworks that can fail to distinguish how the effects of structural arrangements vary depending on race, gender, and sexual orientation. Next, they critiqued the onset of universal constructs within human behavior theory and their subsequent influence. Jani and Reisch (2011) recognized that Towle both stressed that needs were universal and that there were developmental variations that required specific understanding. Furthermore she pioneered in understanding the role of social content on individual behavior. However, they concluded that the dual influence of universal assumptions about human need and the focus primarily on individual behavior divorced from social context meant that in subsequent decades there were widely adopted assumptions about what was considered normal human behavior.

Jani and Reisch (2011) suggested that although there was subsequent awareness of diversity, it was often merely an amendment to such underlying universal assumptions, rather than representing a fundamentally illuminating framework. These assumptions of commonality, they contended, influenced social work's ecosystems perspective, which they saw as focused on fitting individual needs into existing sets of resources. This reinforced an artificial micro/mezzo/macro division in social work's theorization of how to approach both individual
and social change. Modernist theoretical approaches such as those of Maslow assumed a static and universal hierarchy of human needs. This approach often assumed needs could be addressed by an autonomous biopsychosocial individual engaged in rational pursuit of their needs within a social environment seen as conducive to need satisfaction.

Starting from what they saw as a century of such person-in-environment thinking, the TIME model recognized that people have similar life tasks but seek to address them via varying approaches. These varying ways of addressing needs and tasks can be better appreciated if one uses postmodern critical theory and macrosociological theory in tandem. This helps to develop an integrated understanding of an individual's unique microdevelopmental circumstances and individual identity, within the context of their historically and culturally contextualized individual and social experiences.

Jani and Reisch concluded, based upon their integration of the theories of Freud, Erikson, Mahler, and Vygotsky, that there are six common human needs: (1) intimacy within some set of significant relationships, (2) the chance to develop and express creativity, (3) opportunities for learning and growing psychologically, emotionally and intellectually, (4) leisure and work together with peers, (5) adequate levels of material support, and (6) work that can satisfy psychological, social and economic needs. However, the emphasis of their work was not so much on presenting yet another list of universal human needs but rather on viewing all needs as nonlinear. This means that needs are multidimensional and that there is not necessarily a hierarchical relationship between biological, psychological, social and spiritual needs. In addition, needs were seen as mutually exclusive from each other, in the sense they exist in isolation from each other.

Accordingly, the typology of needs of Jani and Reisch (2011) didn’t need to have mutually exclusive components. Finally, the process of satisfying one need was seen as impacting the evolution and satisfaction of other needs, as well as how they are perceived. This dynamic model of human needs sought to transcend mere lists of needs and sought to contribute an alternative framework for thinking about needs. The authors concluded by referring to emerging theories of need, thus implicitly recognizing there is room for further theoretical developments with respect to human need.

Social Research

Similar patterns of growing recent usage of SDT and THN can be seen in social research. The SDT work of Ryan and Sapp (2007) was included in a collection edited by Gough and McGregor (2007), which focused on the use of needs theory in research on quality of life and well-being in international social development. On the surface it would appear that THN is more macro oriented, and SDT is more micro. But contributions from each theory have been used at all levels of analysis. For instance, SDT has been used to analyze inequities in the system of capitalism (Kasser, 2002, 2011) and THN has been used to study the measurement of children's individual needs (O'Brien, 2010).
Approximately 1600 theses and dissertations have now drawn on SDT, including approximately 100 in social work. One social work dissertation at the University of Texas-Arlington (Ferron, 2007) evaluated the Treatment Motivation Questionnaire among persons with serious mental illness and found support for the value of SDT.

In *Children and Youth Services Review*, Blakey (2012) drew extensively on Ryan and Deci (2000) to present research on the relationship of intrinsic motivation to external motivation among African-American women pursuing family reunification. In the same journal, Gillard and Roark (2013) applied the basic needs component of SDT to study levels of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, with higher levels of such needs satisfaction found to be positively correlated with disclosure of HIV status.

SDT has been used in research on health; human relationships, education; parenting; work organizations; aging; medicine, and sports and recreation. In *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, Masters concluded (2006, p. 588), “It also suggests the utility of advancing the theory of self-determination in enhancing the caregiving role (Deci & Ryan, 1987) by allowing the caregiver to be the ultimate decision maker in selecting a service.”

THN has been used in needs assessment research (Percy-Smith, 1996), cross-national comparative social welfare research (Gough, 2000), and human well-being research (Costanza et al., 2007; Gough et al., 2007). Operationalizations of the Doyal–Gough theory have been used for research on women’s health (McMunn, Bartley, & Kuh, 2006 2006), risk and resilience in children (Little, Axford, & Morpeth, 2004 2004), housing adaptations for persons with disabilities (Heywood, 2004), and community-based needs assessment (Percy-Smith & Sanderson, 1992). One study found that consumers of services were more concerned with broadly conceived universal human needs, while providers were more focused on service needs related to domestic violence, child abuse, and substance abuse (Darling, Hager, Stockdale, & Heckert, 2002).

Given the research discussed here and in the earlier sections on social welfare policy and social work practice, if these citation patterns continue, it is likely that in the years to come there will be a substantial increase in the use of SDT, THN and other emerging theories of need in research.

**Social and Political Action**

The recognition of universal human needs and their culturally unique expression have been seen as fundamental for an emancipatory social work approach (Mullaly, 2001). But such a universalist perspective was also seen as a hindrance to empowering communities to engage in autonomous needs definition (Ife, 2009). This section discusses the manner in which human needs are seen as a platform from which to advance social work’s ethical responsibility to engage in social and political action.

For social and political action, the previous entry identified Olson's (2007) need-based
conceptualization of social justice for social work, and Gil's contention (2004) that social action for social justice required a conceptualization of human needs. Olson called into question the extent of social work's commitment to social justice as an organizing concept (2007). Drawing upon Maslow, he viewed the meeting of physiological and safety needs as the foundation of economic justice. Furthermore, he contended that satisfying work, education, and cultural development would enhance human needs for love of others and for self-love. He proposed a professional project for social work based upon such a needs-based conceptualization of social justice.

Human need as a concept has been used in the empowerment perspective (Cox & Joseph, 1998; Gutiérrez, Parsons, & Cox, 1998). Also, human needs were an important element of a solid community organizing perspective (Joseph, 1986). Noble and Wagner reported on an example of political action focused on the human needs of poor and working people in Maine (2004).

Recently, Kasser (2011) has drawn on SDT to critique Anglo-capitalism's tendency to promote extrinsic values which undermine human autonomy. Brock (2009) has suggested that THN and other needs concepts are indispensable for the emerging discussion of global justice. Dover contended that human needs and human rights should both inform our social and political action and play a role in bringing social justice back into the center of our conceptualization of social work practice (2009a). Seeking an alternative vision that can inform collective action by social workers, Reisch and Jani (2012) suggested drawing on critical theory to reconsider the nature of power, needs, rights and capabilities.

In one examination of anti-oppressive social work practice (Dominelli, 2002), the conceptual difficulties of attempting to capture any understanding of universal human needs are too immense to overcome. This posed a risk for neglecting or suppressing the lived experiences of diverse groups of people. One specific danger of using needs-based conceptualizations is that service providers would define needs for groups and restrict services and benefits to those determined to be in need (Dominelli, 2002, p. 28): “Configuring discourses around need in this manner is also racist, classist, ageist and disablist.”

Dominelli was equally critical of universalizing discourses focused on human rights. But she was also critical of the pessimism of postmodernism, if it meant failing to recognize how people’s lives are subject to multiple interlocking systems and ideologies. Dominelli contended that social workers should focus on enhancing well-being, and that (2002, p. 130) “the economy should be structured to meet human needs, that is, that social policies should not be subordinated to economic policies,” as is done by neoliberalism.

In the epilogue to the second edition of Confronting Injustice and Oppression (2013, p. 137), David Gil contended that social workers typically focus on symptoms rather than on causes, such as oppression and exploitation. He also pointed out that (Gil, 2013, p. xiv) “…social movements for justice and liberation will continue to occur as long as oppression remains and until social justice is established from local to global levels.” As social workers participate in
such movements, concepts of human need may be of value for theoretical consideration.

Social Work Values and Ethics

The values of social work have long incorporated the concept of human need (Boehm, 1958; Reamer, 1993; Timms, 1983), although it was not until 1996 that the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers utilized the concept of human needs (National Association of Social Workers, 1996). The 1956 Working Definition of Social Work Practice, developed by the Subcommittee on the Working Definition of Social Work Practice for the Commission on Social Work Practice, National Association of Social Workers (Bartlett, 1958), in describing social work practice, referred to a constellation of value, purpose, sanction, knowledge and method.

Among the values listed was (1958, p. 6): “There are human needs common to each person, yet each person is essentially unique and different from others.” Human needs were universal and could be met by society-wide economic processes. On the other hand, they were relative, residual and subject to specialized intervention. Explaining our sanction from society, the document stated (p. 6): “Social work has developed out of a community recognition of the need to provide services to meet basic needs…”

Boehm pointed out (1958, p. 10): “Social work as a profession came into being and continues to develop because it meets human needs and aspirations recognized by society.” Boehm (1958, p. 12) pointed out that the economic resources were available to address needs in the economic sphere and also to enable increased focus on social, emotional, and spiritual needs. He stressed the obligation of individuals to satisfy their own needs as much as possible, but viewed needs satisfaction as a means rather than an end. Needs satisfaction was seen as a necessary condition for higher order goals such as dignity and fulfillment of human potential. Human needs were also seen as culturally conditioned and relative, and as arising from problems or defects in the person-institutional relationship.

Kadushin's inventory of professional knowledge and skills stated that social workers require knowledge of the nature of human needs that social welfare programs are designed to meet (Kadushin, 1959). However, by the late 1950s, no fully developed theory of needs was extant. Towle’s Common Human Needs (1945) was primarily a training manual for public assistance workers. The book represented what today would be considered a human behavior in the social environment text.

This was also a time when modern social work had begun to unify through the National Association of Social Workers. The profession was also expanding institutionally through Council on Social Work Education accredited programs, and growing intellectually through new doctoral programs. During the first fifty years of the 20th century, social work was primarily applied moral, political and religious philosophy. But beginning with the 1950s social work sought to transform itself into an applied social science, often dropping its previous philosophical predilections (Dover, 2011).
This meant putting aside theories that were not deemed adequately scientific, such as Maslow’s theory of need, and forging new theory for the field (Kahn, 1959). Also, despite this use of human needs concepts in social work, Western values of individualism and the influence of Freudian theory may have reduced the influence of humanistic theories of need within social work (Galper, 1975; Lichtenberg, 1969).

Instead, social work turned to eco-systems and other theories. For many years, the concept of human needs disappeared from social work’s ethical codes. The first Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (National Association of Social Workers, 1961) used concepts such as well-being, and stressed the need to advance knowledge, skills and philosophy of the profession. However, the focus was primarily on responsibilities to clients and the profession, with some mention of the program. Concepts such as human needs, human rights and social justice were absent. The next revision retained the identical preamble (1967), but the statement of our primary obligation now included “action for improving social conditions” and strengthened the previous statements about non-discrimination.

The 1979 Code of Ethics was the first to clearly differentiate among our various ethical responsibilities, including those to society. There was some limited development of the philosophy of the profession, including the first use of the concept of client self-determination, our responsibility for promoting the general welfare, our special responsibilities to “disadvantaged and oppressed groups and persons,” and our responsibilities to engage in policy advocacy the promotion of social justice.

The 1996 revision was the first Code of Ethics to use the concept of human needs, giving it a prominent place in the preamble (1996):

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession’s focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society.

Discussing these ethical developments, and citing Towle's Common Human Needs, Reamer pointed out that the concept of common human needs is well established in social work. This also reinforced our historic commitment to meeting basic needs and enhancing well-being (Reamer, 1998; Towle, 1945). This usage of the phrase addressing needs rather than meeting needs was significant. It gave stronger philosophical content to social workers’ role in enhancing well-being and ensuring that organizations were responsive to the needs of people and communities. It also clarified the respective roles of social workers and the people and communities we work with. Addressing, discussing, and clarifying needs are things that social workers and the people we work with do together, whereas the notion of meeting needs implies a social work role in meeting needs directly, in a way that could produce dependence and undermine self-determination.
With respect to the value of service, “Social workers’ primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.” With respect to the value of dignity and worth of the person, the Code stated (1996): “Social workers seek to enhance clients’ capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs.” The Code made reference to the distinction between “needs and preferences” in the context of termination of services, and to client needs in the context of client transfers. This specific mention involved attention to service needs rather than human needs. The same may be true in other rather generic usages of the term needs, such as the responsibility of administrators to ensure adequate resources for clients’ needs.

Generally, however, this revision of the Code of Ethics clearly recognized the distinction between human needs and service needs. For instance, in the section on ethical responsibility to society, the Code stated (1996, pp., 6.01): “Social workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice.”

Here, for the first time, human needs and social justice were linked together, with both being stressed. When it came to social and political action (1996, 6.04(a)):

Social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully. Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice.

Social workers have a specific ethical responsibility to have “knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity,” in relation to our commitment to social justice (1996). Should social workers likewise have knowledge about human needs and their culturally specific manifestations, in relation to our value commitment to service, which draws on “knowledge, values, and skills to help people in need and to address social problems?”

Needs, Rights, and Justice: Recent Theoretical Developments

The present entry reports advances in recognizing the relationship of needs to rights, such as Dean’s (2013) work. This stressed that negotiation amongst people as to how to recognize, claim and address needs leads to the formulation of rights in relation to social citizenship at the local, national and global levels. This section also reviews contributions that explain the relationship of needs to capabilities and to social justice.

Perhaps no one has placed the relationship between human needs and human rights as starkly as Joseph Wronka (2008a, p. Preface): “The purpose of this book is to examine how the powerful idea of human rights can assist in the creation of a socially just world. Technically, human
rights do not exist. However, human needs do.” Although it has been pointed out that advocates shouldn't be focused only on satisfaction of needs (McCloskey, 1976), not identifying needs weakens the enforcement of rights based upon them (Bay, 1980) and hinders identifying obligations to address needs and respect rights (Wringe, 2005).

An early social work review of THN discussed both human rights and human needs, instead of pitting them against each other as competing concepts (Dover, 1993). The review noted cited earlier calls for social work to build coalitions organized around demands for human need satisfaction (Abramovitz & Blau, 1984; Blau, 1992). Concepts of need were seen as important for understanding social justice (Gil, 2004; Witkin, 1998; Wronka, 1992).

Wakefield utilized Braybrooke's philosophy of needs in his work on the relationship of psychotherapy to social justice (Braybrooke, 1968; Wakefield, 1988). Bay (1982) formulated a normative proposition that there are four types of need: survival, health protection, community solidarity, and individual freedom. There were seen as consistent with concepts such as avoidance of serious harm, health, social participation, and autonomy, respectively (Len Doyal & Gough, 1991). Bay (1982) linked these needs to human, political, and legal rights, and saw satisfaction of such needs as a prerequisite to meaningful access to the basic liberties spelled out in Rawl's (1971) theory of justice.

Any overview of human need requires explanation of the relationships of theories of human need, human rights and social justice. According to Wronka's entry on human rights in the Encyclopedia of Social Work (2008b), human rights are ultimately a “legal mandate to fulfill human need.” This succinctly summarizes a good deal of discussion of that relationship (Bay, 1988; Wringe, 2005). Although rights shouldn't be explained merely on the basis of the satisfaction of needs (McCloskey, 1976), failure to identify objective needs undermines the assertion of rights based upon them (Bay, 1980).

However, while human needs and human rights concepts are often seen as reinforcing each other, Noonan stressed the centrality of meeting human needs for the development of democratic societies. He pointed out that conceptualizations of rights often give primacy of place to property rights in a way which can inhibit the meeting of human needs (Noonan, 2005).

One way of reconciling the vocabularies of needs and rights is to better conceptualize human obligations (Wringe, 2005). Wronka has pointed out that duties to the community are recognized in Article 29 of the International Declaration of Human Rights (Wronka, 1992). Amartya Sen pointed out in Development as Freedom that basic political and liberal rights are directly related to people's social and political participation, and their ability to exercise their claim that their economic needs be respected (Sen, 1985). Political liberty and civil rights are essential if we are to better conceptualize our needs, including our economic needs (Sen, 1999).

Regarding the relationship of needs to rights, Dean's (2013) work stressed that negotiation amongst people as to how to recognize, claim and address needs leads to the formulation of rights in relation to social citizenship at the local, national and global levels. Despite these
advances in theories of human need, debate continues about whether one can speak of universal human needs and rights. The complex relationship of human rights and human needs as concepts, and their relevance for social work, have received a good deal of attention from James Ife, whose work is summarized below.

The Work of James Ife on Human Rights and Human Needs

The dissertation of James Ife resulted in published work (1980) which contended that human needs had been a central concept for the social services. Services were often designed with the needs of individuals and social groups in mind, often determined via some needs assessment. However, the nature of the needs so assessed was often undefined, due to a lack of conceptual exploration. In that respect, Ife (1980) cited Davies (1977, p. 129) as contending that “insufficient time and effort have been devoted to the analysis of the concepts and their measurement.”

Ife later contended that social work should transcend needs-based approaches and adhere to rights-based practice, although he recognized the value of discussing needs in relation to rights (Ife, 2001). In his Hokenstad International Social Work Lecture (2007), Ife advocated for a strong focus on human rights and social justice for international social work. This growing stress on human rights within social work education was reflected in the removal of the concept of human needs from the Council on Social Work Education (2008) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards.

Ife's 2009 book focused on fully explaining the conceptual foundation for two concepts, human rights and community development (Ife, 2009). He recognized that there is a contradiction between the requirements of our economic system and the rights and needs of people. He decried the failure of the global economy to address local needs, and stressed a definition of need which involved the community defining its needs and mobilizing to address them. In conceptualizing rights and need, Ife critiqued overly universalistic thinking about human rights by stressing the need to link them to specific local needs, referring specifically to the Doyal and Gough THN.

He later (p. 131) criticized Doyal and Gough for constructing a universal and positivistic theory of objective needs which implied rights. If anything, he suggested, it would the reverse, with universal rights leading to locally constructed needs. As an alternative to positivism, Ife drew on interpretive social science and critical theory. Ife suggested the value of postmodernism's opposition to the dominance of master narratives, including those of human rights.

In his most recent book, Ife's thinking about human needs and his use of THN appeared to have evolved (2013). He continued to view basic needs involving adequate minimum standards as difficult to define, given the environmental and cultural conditions in which they would need to be defined. However, he contended that it is very important to stress human rights to adequate dietary impact, citing Doyal and Gough (1991) favorably in that regard. In his chapter on social justice, Ife pointed out that social justice is often discussed in terms of need, and this is
fundamental for social policy and planning.

Ife spelled out an approach to need definition, using needs statements as both normative and descriptive, thus reflecting both preferences for changed conditions and the realities of the present situation as perceived by the persons making the statement. Drawing on his earlier work (Ife, 1980), he contended that these persons can be of four kinds: (1) the general population, (2) current or future recipients of the relevant service or benefit, (3) caretakers such as social workers, (4) researchers and planners.

Such a typology made clear the potential contradictions between the four populations involved in needs definition, the very struggles over need long stressed by Fraser (Fraser, 1989). It also appeared to show the limitations of expertise and information confronting all participants in needs definition. Where there are significant departures between the various populations involved in the needs definition process, Ife stressed the primacy of community and consumer interpretations. He didn’t fully address Doyal and Gough’s concern (1991) about differences between a community-wide consensus and the interpretations of particular sectors of a community. However, he reconsidered the contributions of THN and provided a lengthy rendition of the central tenets of THN with respect to the universalism and relativism of human need.

Ife made what amounts to a significant contribution to the articulation of needs theory for community development. He had previously minimized needs concepts, stressing the centrality of identifying rights from below. Now, however, Ife (2013) followed the logic of his stress on the process of defining rights and needs to its ultimate conclusion. This conclusion gives central importance to discourse on needs for defining and articulating rights. Ife (2013) has made an important contribution to social work's understanding of human needs.

Future Trends and Opportunities

As this entry has demonstrated, there are now two extant and substantially compatible theories of human needs, SDT and THN, which are increasingly informing social work practice and research. Additionally, there is a TIME model for how to think critically about using theories of common human needs (Jani & Reisch, 2011), and an approach to the use of human needs and human rights discourse in social development (Ife, 2013). Will work social more fully incorporate human needs concepts in years to come? Perhaps a start to answering this question is to pose a series of questions.

Is it possible to systematically analyze within group and between group similarities and differences in how people and communities interpret and address human needs? Would this in turn make it more possible to recognize how human needs, human rights and social justice are related to each other as concepts central to the social work profession? Can the recent work of Ife (2013) suggest new ways to think about human rights in relation to human needs? Can the work of Jani and Reisch (2011) suggest ways of incorporating needs concepts into social work practice?
As is often the case with path dependent institutional practices (Tucker, 1996), will social work stay on the path set in recent decades? This path has been marked by widespread assumptions about human needs (Jani & Reisch, 2011) but little explicit use of needs concepts (Dover & Joseph, 2008). Once a concept falls into disuse by an organization central within an organizational field, the theory of institutional isomorphism would suggest that organizations within that field would likewise neglect that concept (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Take for example the above-discussed discontinuation by C.S.W.E. of the concept of human need. Does this mean that social work programs with parallel relationships with this accrediting body might similarly discontinue usage?

Or will there be enhanced discourse about needs, given likely continued struggles over needs (Fraser, 1989)? After all, path dependent processes are not necessarily permanent, especially if there are new co-occurring institutional developments (North, 1993). For one example, the concept of empowerment saw a rapid increase in usage following the work of Gilbert (1974) and Solomon (1976). Does this show that a neglected theoretical discourse can quickly become central to social work's theory base? Is human need theory such a neglected theoretical perspective?

Will one influence on future trends and opportunities for incorporating human needs content be the extent to which the profession embraces the interdisciplinarity of our knowledge base? For instance, there is variation among social work doctoral programs in the extent to which students are required to take courses in other disciplines (Tucker, 2008). The present review suggests that much of the theory and research about human needs is taking place within the liberal arts foundation of social work, but has yet to be fully applied within social work. Will the extent to which social work enhances interdisciplinarity in knowledge policy influence the extent to which human needs theories like SDT and THN are adopted in social work?

This entry has illustrated how the concept of autonomy used in both THN and SDT has a fourfold focus on agential traits such as independence, choices, capabilities and actively addressed needs. Can such theory be enriched through incorporation of recognition of four of humankind's non-agential features, such as dependence, necessities, incapabilities, and passively met needs, as experienced in human development over the life course (Miller, 2005; S. C. Miller, 2012; Reader, 2007a)?

Is it possible that such an approach could produce critical thinking about these questions, questions that would enrich social work theoretically? Would this be an example of humanity building its dikes against the tides of human misery, in our own unique manner as social workers who help people care for each other (Reynolds, 1963)? Could such an approach help social work identify its allies and work to build coalitions which can address human needs, human rights and social justice, however these three concepts are prioritized (Reisch & Jani, 2012; Reynolds, 1951)?

What are the implications of Brock's (2009, p. 900) philosophical question, “What is it to enable
someone to meet a need?” Could answering such a question be a good example of social work’s indigenous theoretical creativity? One example of such creativity – empowerment theory – has already been identified. Another, the theoretical potential of the TIME model, has also been discussed here. Also, the literature identified in this entry suggested a linking of caring and needs (S. C. Miller, 2012), something already subject to critical consideration in nursing (Fagermoen, 2006; Fortin, 2006; Kikuchi, 2005). Could reincorporation of theories of caring and of human need into social work reduce our eclecticism and suggest a new paradigm for social work (Tucker, 1996)?

Tucker (1996) proposed that social work consider as one focus for its paradigm that of caring, by which he meant formal provision for or tending to the material and emotional well-being of disadvantaged, oppressed and vulnerable populations. Didn’t that proposal, however, beg the question, caring for what? How does a profession conceptualize well-being? Is well-being a jumble of variables or a philosophically constructed theory or a theologically understood phenomenon? Who is responsible for caring, and what does caring involve? Where would a profession start in developing such a paradigm?

Ben-Ari and Strier (2010) have proposed an ethics of care as a new starting point for social work, citing the work of Banks (Banks, 2006). Rossiter has also proposed that we begin again by consulting Lévinasian ethics. She stressed the realm of sociality, and proposed a reconsideration of our responses to others (2011). She recognized how unsettling this might be to our previous conceptualizations.

Would an ethics of caring require, as Lévinas recognized (2001), not only acts of goodness exterior to any system of care, not only an ethics sans system, but a system of justice? Would such an ethics of caring require not only a “goodness without regime” but also a “regime without evil,” a “regime of charity” (Lévinas & Robbins, 2001, p. 81)?

Do we humans face what Kanfer and Schefft (1988, p. 8) called “limits in information processing?” Are we what Herbert A. Simon called (1955, p. 114) a “choosing organism of limited knowledge and ability,” which inevitably seeks to simplify complex realities for purposes of imperfect choice? According to this perspective, faced with our bounded rationality, we strive for altruism by adopting a stance of docility. We learn from the others in front of us, accepting their social influence (Simon, 1990), a process quite similar to SDT’s conceptualization of internalization (Deci, 2012), and arguably not so foreign to Lévinasian prescriptions for openness to the face of the other.

Given the infinity and enormity of the human need social workers face daily, do we have a moral dilemma of the sort suggested by Rossiter (2011)? Do we jettison all theories due to the risk we will totalize and oversimplify the single other person facing us, and make false assumptions about their and our human needs? Or in doing so, would we be risking what Lévinas referred to as (p. 81) “the chance of individual charity?” Should we instead guide our actions, in part at least, by the lessons of our own and other’s best efforts at social theory? Should we engage our clients and communities in discourse and struggles about needs? Could we better respond to the
other(s) in front of us if we pondered and debated theories about the nature of our human needs?

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Future Reading


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