Using Theory Charts of Human Injustice, Human Need, and Human Liberation to Enable Students to Critically Re-Envision Their Views on Social Justice and Social Injustice

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Abstract

This Poster Presentation showcases the pedagogical value of developing graphical renditions of theoretical work in teaching WAC to undergraduates in SWK 303: Human Behavior in the Social Environment, a WAC course open to non-social work majors, who comprise at least a third of my students most terms. I present and explain Figure 1: Theories of human need: Theory of human need (THN) and self-determination theory (SDT) from Dover, M. A. (2023, Forthcoming). Human needs: Overview. In C. Franklin (Ed.), The *encyclopedia of social work* (pp. 1-49). Oxford University Press. https://works.bepress.com/michael-dover/24/. Below that, I explain earlier theoretical work: Dover, M. A. (2019). A needs-based partial theory of human injustice: Oppression, Dehumanization, Exploitation, and Systematic Inequality in Opportunities to Address Human Needs. *Humanity & Society*, 43(4), 442-483. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597619832623. The presentation of the poster will involve explaining how seeing the charts have enabled students to compare and contrast theories of human need and build on their earlier use of C. P. Jones' definition of institutional racism as disproportionate "inaction in the face of need." Students also apply these theories to characters/plots in feature films and to case examples from *This City is Killing Me*. This enables students to think more critically of Maslowian approaches to human need, liberal philosophical approaches to social justice (Rawls), and ideologically driven approaches to injustice that fail to incorporate attention to wrongfully unmet human need. *Figure 1: Theories of human need: Theory of human need (THN) and self-determination theory (SDT) is used with permission and adapted from Doyal & Gough (1991, Figure 8.2, p. 170, as used with permission and extended in Dover (2019, Figure 1), published by Sage Publications via Creative Commons 4.0. Box I was suggested by Ian Gough (personal communication, April 2022). Graphical enhancements by Karla Fitch, MA, MSW-Candidate, Cleveland State University.*

Comparing and Contrasting SDT and THN Via Figure 1 (Excerpts from Dover, 2023)

SDT and THN both see basic needs as human universals met in culturally specific manners (Figure 1, box B). The optimization of human need satisfaction requires cross-culturally informed and enhanced needs satisfiers (Figure 1, box I).

Figure 1 links Columns 1 and 2 theoretically by illustrating basic human need satisfaction in Column 1 and human liberation—a needs-based conceptualization of social justice—in Column 2.

Doyal and Gough (1991, Figure 8.2, p. 170) and Gough (2017a, Figure 2.1, p. 43) supplied the overall structure of Figure 1. The SDT elements are updated from a needs-based theorization of human injustice which contained a left-side column portraying human injustice (Dover, 2019, Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows the minimal preconditions for basic human need satisfaction at the bottom of Column 1 (box A). Box A outlines only the least developed societal pre-conditions necessary for meeting basic needs. The bottom of Column 2 (box G) shows the human rights which are necessary—but not sufficient—for human liberation.

In Column 1, the satisfaction of basic human needs requires culturally specific satisfiers of intermediate needs (boxes B and C). These satisfiers are objective and have universal characteristics (Gough, 2017a, Figure 2.1, p 43). For THN, these include eleven intermediate needs (box C), while SDT discusses the elements of a need-supportive environment (Box C bottom).

Significant primary relationships are an intermediate need for THN (box C), a concept like SDT's psychological need for relatedness (box E). Both theories claim that the satisfaction of basic human needs (boxes D and E) requires the psychological, physiological, and environmental inputs noted in box C. Also, both theories recognize no need can be met if another is unmet. Both theories see needs as specific and satiable.

THN and SDT also converge in compatible universal goals (see Column 1, Box F).
THN and SDT contend that human liberation and human flourishing, respectively, are a universal goal, as illustrated in Box K.

To achieve critical autonomy and self-determination (Column 2, box J), we must first meet our basic human needs (Column 1, boxes D and E). THN and SDT both recognize (Column 2, box G) that human rights of various kinds are necessary for achieving more than merely basic levels of human need satisfaction. The critical autonomy/self-determination outlined in box J requires both the cross-cultural education discussed in box H and the availability of cross-culturally informed need satisfiers in Box I.

Not only is cross-cultural education necessary for achieving human liberation (THN and human flourishing (SDT), it also requires cross-culturally informed need satisfiers (box I, suggested by Gough, 2022, private communication, used with permission). The supra-optimal levels of critical autonomy and self-determination and the autonomous, self-determined choices among ways of life shown in box J require exposure to alternative ways of life (box H).
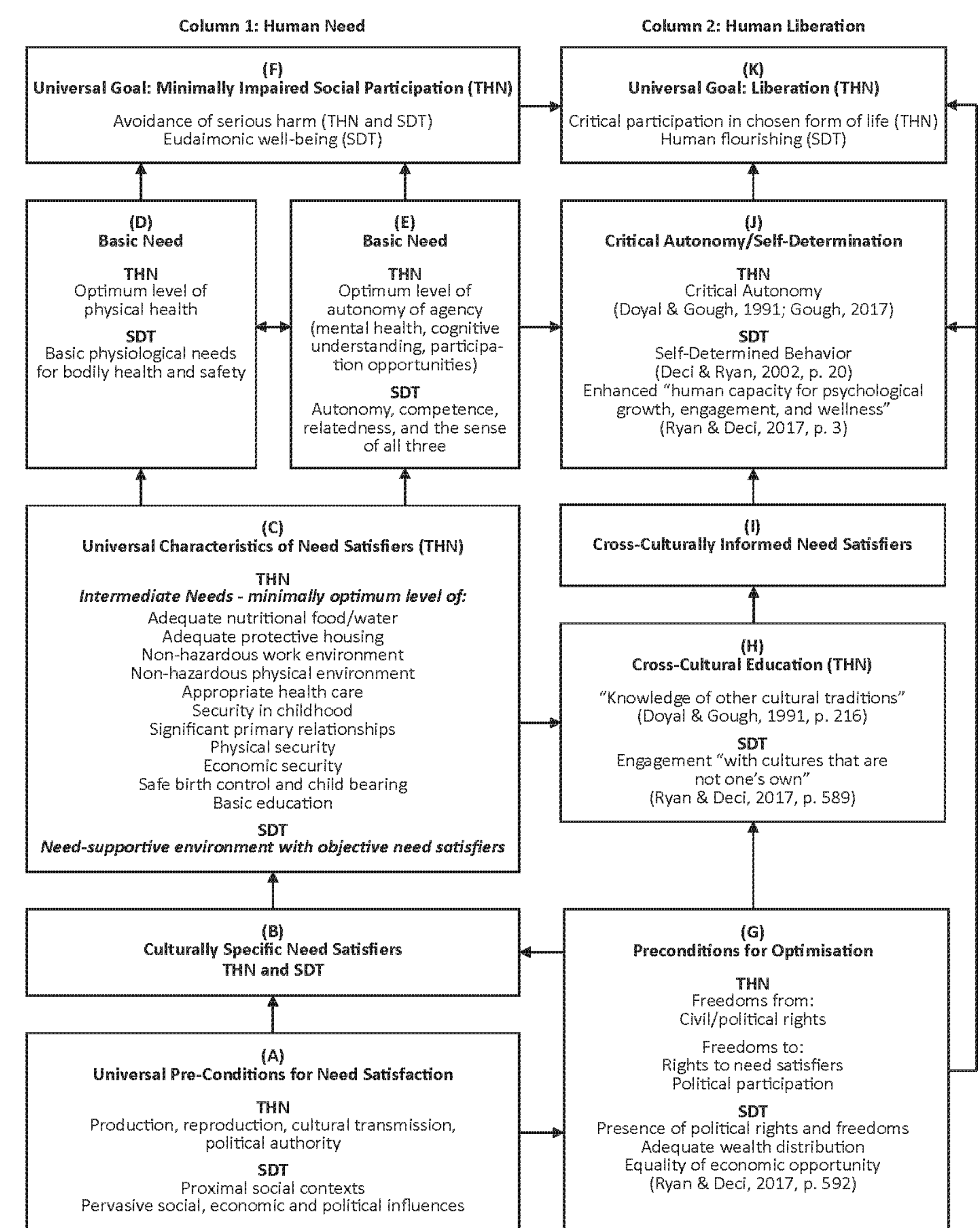

Figure 1: Theories of human need: Theory of human need (THN) and self-determination theory (SDT)

Illustrating How Oppression, Exploitation and Mechanistic Dehumanization, Absent Prevention, Produce Human Injustice: Systematic Inequality in Chances to Access Needs Satisfiers, Wrongfully Unmet Needs and Serious Harm (Excerpts from Dover, 2019)

Excerpts from Dover (2019). Figure 1 from Dover (2019) was the first effort to graphically portray and fully explain the relationship of THN and SDT. However, more detail is provided in Figure 1, Columns 2 and 3 in Figure 1 (2023). Thus, the text here focuses on an explanation of the relationship of Column 1 on Human Injustice. Both the implicit and explicit aspects of the universalizable goals defined by THN and SDT are inextricably bound up with each other, as part of the avoidance of serious harm and the pursuit of human liberation.

The bottom of column 3 outlines THN's preconditions for the optimization of need satisfaction and for human liberation. This includes a set of human rights with some mechanism for enforcement. There I have placed the phrase universal human rights in parentheses because that term was not in the original THN theory chart. That chart referred to a set of negative and positive rights (Doyal and Gough 1991:170). In a minor semantic revision to the original theory, Gough (2017) recently referred to negative and positive rights as freedoms from and freedoms to, respectively. These include political participation and other political rights, as well as civil rights and a guarantee of the right to needs satisfiers.

Theoretically, these rights outlined in column 3 are preconditions for human liberation. As outlined in column 2, a more limited set of universal preconditions allow meeting basic human needs. The present theory builds on columns 2 and 3 by suggesting that unjust social systems can produce systematic inequality in access to satisfiers of intermediate needs. This reinforces the centrality of the human rights outlined in column 3, since systems of human rights can constrain contemporaneously co-existing systems of human injustice.

Figure 1 illustrates the needs-based theory of human injustice and a typology of human injustice, basic human need satisfaction, and human liberation. Column 1 has four sections: (A) the sources of social injustice, (B) the mechanisms of human injustice, (C) the first part of the nature of human injustice, a state of resultant wrongfully unmet needs, and (D) the other aspect of the nature of human injustice: serious harm and significantly impaired social participation.

Box A illustrates the existence of one or more necessary (but not sufficient) conditions for human injustice, namely a system of oppression, exploitation, or mechanistic dehumanization. Box B of column 1 shows how oppression, mechanistic dehumanization and exploitation can singly or jointly produce systematic inequality in opportunities to access culturally specific need satisfiers due to unique and/or overlapping social mechanisms of one or more of these unjust social systems. Box C illustrates how a combination of the direct effects of systematically unequal opportunities and the effect of that inequality on the adequacy of intermediate need satisfaction can produce a state of wrongfully unmet need.

To constitute human injustice, wrongfully unmet needs (column 1, box C) must be resultant from the sources and mechanisms of human injustice. Only then are they wrongfully unmet needs, as opposed to needs which are unmet for any number of reasons. Determining which specific mix of levels of various intermediate need satisfaction and which specific degree of systematic inequality of access to the available need satisfiers produce what specific degree of wrongfully unmet needs is an empirical question, not a theoretical question. Also, as discussed in more detail below, preventive social interventions, rooted in human rights enforcement, can prevent the advent of wrongfully unmet needs, meet them once unmet, or reverse their harmful effect.

At the individual level of analysis, further portrayed in box D, such a state leads to a strong likelihood of serious harm. Doyal and Gough (1991) saw unmet need as leading to mental illness, cognitive deprivation, and role stress, all of which can impair participation. This is consistent with the role of restricted opportunities in directly producing restricted participation (Doyal and Gough 1991:171-87) As illustrated in box D, column 1, human injustice involves significantly impaired social participation, as opposed to minimally impaired social participation, which column 2 shows is enabled by basic needs satisfaction.