

UNLOCKING THE MIND



A GUIDE TO UNDERSTAND HUMAN NEEDS
USING THERMODYNAMICS



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Introduction

Imagine a world where we can decipher the complexities of the human mind using the same principles that govern the physical universe. A world where we can map out our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors as clearly as we can trace the path of a falling object or the flow of heat. A world where psychological well-being is as predictable and manageable as physical phenomena. And where we can understand and address the root causes of psychological dysfunction with the precision and clarity of scientific laws.

This world exists.

Welcome to Thermodynamic Psychology, a revolutionary approach that marries the laws of physics with the intricacies of human behavior. Thermodynamic Psychology is based on the idea that the mind operates as an energy system governed by the same principles that govern physical systems. Just as thermodynamics provides a framework for understanding the transfer and transformation of energy in physical systems, Thermodynamic Psychology offers a framework for understanding the flow and transformation of mental and emotional energy within us.

In this guide, we explore a groundbreaking perspective that offers therapists powerful new tools to enhance their practice and provides psychology enthusiasts with profound insights into the workings of the mind. By applying the principles of thermodynamics, we can better understand how mental energy is conserved,

transformed, and dissipated. This approach allows us to identify the sources of psychological anxiety, depression, and relationship problems—and address them more effectively. This guide will take you on a journey into the heart of Thermodynamic Psychology, where you will learn how to apply these principles to foster well-being and balance in your life and the lives of others.

About the Author:

Dr. Brett McDonald

With a background in Counseling Psychology and Organizational Leadership, I have dedicated my career to understanding the complexities of the human mind and behavior. I hold an M.S. in Counseling Psychology and a Doctorate of Business Administration with an emphasis on Organizational Leadership. I spent 17 years practicing therapy and developing innovative approaches to mental health before starting my career as an organizational psychologist. My journey has included co-founding The Dragonfly Retreat, an inpatient somatic experiential group program incorporating martial arts, and earning a Black Belt in Extreme Defensive Tactics, which I currently use in team-building retreats.



I was inspired to write the book *Thermodynamic Psychology* and this guide because I wanted to share a more comprehensive and kinder approach that helps unite our minds with the natural world. I realized that the principles of thermodynamics could be applied to the human mind, offering a unique perspective on how mental and emotional energy flows and transforms. This realization led to the creation of the Thermodynamic

Psychological system.

My philosophy centers on the idea the mind is pure energy, and consciousness is that energy in motion. Self-concept, how we feel, relate with one another, behave, and think, is largely shaped by shifting patterns of energy movement, which abide by the same rules governing all energy systems. As energy flows toward your own needs and those of your social circle, self-perpetuating and contagious patterns are built. With wise direction, these physics-based forces can be adjusted toward enhancing relationships and achieving better psychological health.

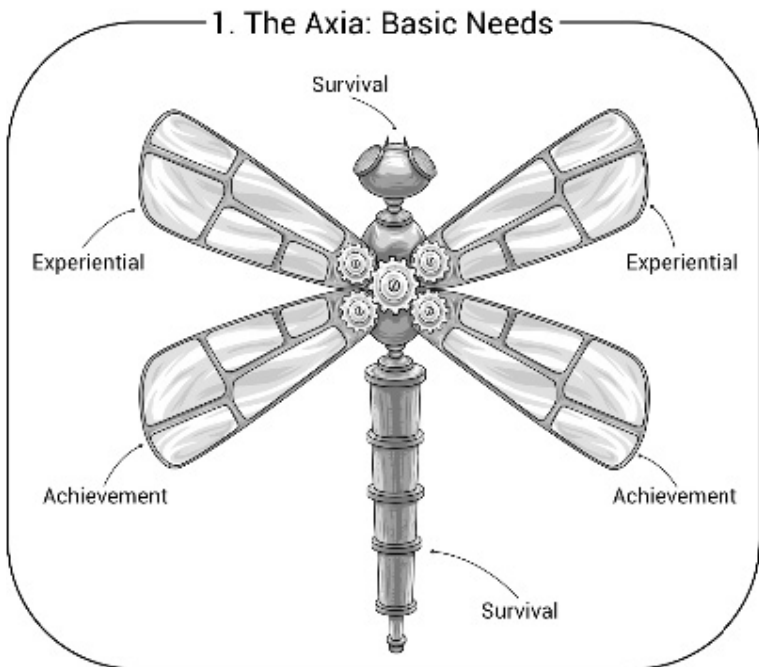
My primary goal with ***Thermodynamic Psychology*** and this guide is to offer practical tools and insights that foster personal and social transformations. By understanding and fulfilling human needs, we can achieve profound changes in our lives and the lives of others. Dive in and prepare to see the mind in a completely new light, where science and human experience converge to unlock the secrets of the psyche.

The Axis of Needs

Understanding Human Needs

At the heart of Thermodynamic Psychology is the concept of the axis of needs, a dynamic system that categorizes human operations into distinct but interconnected areas. Understanding these needs is a crucial foundation of human behavior and mental health.

By viewing human needs through this structured framework, we can gain deeper insights into the motivations behind our actions and develop more effective strategies for personal growth and well-being.



Internal vs. External Needs

Human needs are divided into two primary categories: internal and external.

Internal Needs

Internal needs are those that are just for you and you alone. They reflect our individually defined drives for pleasure, comfort, success, and restoration.

External Needs

External needs are those that are for the benefit of other people. They reflect our innate desire to make a social contribution, to foster a sense of partnership, intimate connection, and purpose within our communities.

All internal and external needs are further categorized into the survival, experiential, and achievement domains.

Categories of Need

Survival Needs

Survival needs are the basic necessities required for physical health and safety. They include essential elements such as food, water, shelter, and protection from harm.

Internal Survival (IS) Needs:

Internal survival needs involve actions we take to maintain our own physical health and well-being. These needs focus on personal habits and behaviors that fulfill

the basic requirements of our own bodies.

Examples:

- **Eating a balanced diet:** Consuming a variety of foods that provide the necessary nutrients for the body to function properly.
- **Drinking enough water:** Staying hydrated to maintain bodily functions and overall health.
- **Safety and shelter:** Ensuring our bodies are protected from the elements of weather, and other physical threats.
- **Regular physical exercise:** Engaging in activities that promote cardiovascular health, strength, and flexibility.
- **Procreating:** Securing a mate to produce offspring.
- **Medical care:** Seeking treatment for injuries or illnesses and engaging with health professionals who help us keep our bodies functioning properly.

External Survival (ES) Needs:

External survival needs involve actions we take to ensure the physical safety and health of other people's bodies.

Examples:

- **Maintaining a safe living environment:** Ensuring one's family home is free from hazards and conducive to health and safety.

- **Providing medical care:** Ensuring that those in our social group have access to health care.
- **Resource stability:** Having the financial resources to provide our social circle with physical necessities like food, shelter, and healthcare.
- **Building a support network for emergencies:** Making sure those we care about can access formal and informal emergency services.

Achievement Needs

Achievement needs include anything we do for its outcome.

This category involves the goals and accomplishments that create a sense of purpose, contribution, productivity, and success. Achievement needs can include career milestones, educational pursuits, community projects, and personal ambitions that produce a productive outcome.

When we fulfill our achievement needs, we experience increased confidence, empowerment, pride, and a sense of agency.

Internal Achievement (IA) Needs:

Internal achievement needs focus on outcomes and accomplishments that are personally defined, and uniquely meaningful to us. These needs are fulfilled through self-improvement, actualizing one's inner potential, and cultivating personal aspirations.

Examples:

- **Setting personal goals and achieving them:** Creating and meeting targets that fulfill one's own dreams of success.
- **Learning new skills or hobbies:** Engaging in activities that enhance personally meaningful abilities and skills.
- **Pursuing further education or certifications:** Enrolling in courses or programs that advance one's academic or professional qualifications. (Such self-development meets an internal achievement need if the field of study is meaningful to the student, and not just driven by social obligations.)
- **Personal development through reading or training:** Continuously improving oneself through various learning opportunities. Refining knowledge and understanding of topics that uniquely resonate with the learner.

External Achievement (EA) Needs:

External achievement needs involve our contributions to the successes, partnerships, teamwork, and outcome objectives held by other people. These needs manifest in productive contributions to one's family, immediate social group, community, and workplace.

Examples:

- **Domestic duties:** Working to meet ongoing household duties.

- **Social help:** Providing practical assistance to friends, neighbors, and extended family.
- **Contributing to team success at work:** Collaborating with colleagues to achieve the goals and objectives of group efforts.
- **Volunteering and making an impact in your community:** Participating in activities that make a practical contribution to the community and create positive social change.

Experiential Needs

Experiential needs are driven by the process of a behavior, not the outcome.

These needs involve activities we do for sheer joy, relaxation, fun, comfort, or enjoyment. They include hobbies, leisure activities, gestures of kindness, and other things we do in our “free time.”

Fulfilling experiential needs helps us recharge, reduces stress, promote relationship bonding, recover from emotional injuries, and enhance our overall quality of life.

Engaging in experiential activities helps us sustain good mental health, restore ourselves, foster social intimacy, and create a sense of playfulness, relaxation, and fun.

Internal Experiential (IE) Needs:

Internal experiential needs involve behaviors that are done for the process, not the outcome, for the benefit of yourself.

When we engage in activities that are relaxing, joyful, restorative, or comforting to ourselves, we are meeting internal experiential needs.

Examples:

- **Practicing mindfulness or meditation:** Engaging in activities that promote mental clarity and relaxation.
- **Hobbies like painting, gardening, or crafts:** Participating in creative endeavors that are enjoyable for the process of creating them.
- **Spending time in nature:** Reconnecting with the natural world to experience peace and rejuvenation.
- **Listening to music or reading for pleasure:** Indulging in sensory or artful experiences that provide enjoyment, incite imagination, or enflame emotional passion.
- **Receiving emotional comfort, kindness, or affection:** When someone we care about supports us through emotional struggles, comforts us when we are hurt, or shows us physical love, the internal experiential need category is nurtured.

External Experiential (EE) Needs:

External experiential needs involve behaviors that are done for the process, not the outcome, and are for the benefit of other people.

When we spend time helping those in our social circle relax, have fun, or restore themselves, we are fulfilling external experiential needs. We can also meet these needs by showing kindness, giving affection, comforting, uplifting, and supporting others during times of pain.

By fulfilling external experiential needs, we enhance social bonds, build emotional intimacy and trust, shore up others' being-based selves, and create a sense of community.

Examples:

- **Socializing with friends and family:** Spending quality time with loved ones, engaging in ways that are fun or enjoyable to them.
- **Participating in group activities or sports:** Engaging in collective endeavors that promote teamwork, create a good time for others, and building camaraderie.
- **Providing emotional comfort during times of need:** When we take time to help heal the experiential injuries others incur, and kindly show others we care about them as people.
- **Physical affection, playfulness, and celebration:** When we make others laugh, give them a hug, provide sexual intimacy, celebrate or entertain them, we fulfill external experiential needs.

By understanding and addressing these categories of needs, we can create a balanced and fulfilling life. But if we ignore, neglect, or harm these needs, we experience

pain, social conflict, disconnect, loss of self-worth, and psychological dysfunction.

Thermodynamic Psychology provides a comprehensive framework for recognizing when our needs are unmet and developing strategies to effectively fulfill them.

This approach empowers individuals to take control of their mental and emotional energy, leading to healthier, happier lives.

Self-Assessment Tool

The Axis of Needs Quiz

To help you assess the health of your internal and external achievement and experiential needs, I have developed a short self-assessment quiz.

This tool is designed to provide immediate value and personalized insights, encouraging you to engage and apply the principles of Thermodynamic Psychology in your own life.

How the Quiz Works:

Your results will indicate needs that are being fulfilled and needs that are being neglected or damaged in your life. This will help you gain self- and other-awareness, so you can mindfully navigate toward improved psychological and social well-being.

1. Questions for Internal Achievement Needs:

1.1. How frequently do you set and achieve personal goals?

- 1 = less than once per month
- 2 = once per month
- 3 = once per week
- 4 = several times per week
- 5 = daily

1.2. How often do you spend time actively learning new skills or hobbies?

- 1 = less than once per month
- 2 = once per month
- 3 = once per week
- 4 = several times per week
- 5 = daily

1.3. How often do you ask for help or accept accommodation from others in your achievement of personal success?

- 1 = less than once per month
- 2 = once per month
- 3 = once per week
- 4 = several times per week
- 5 = daily

Scoring:

Add up your scores for the questions in this section and divide by 3.

Assessment:

- **4 to 5 points:** Excellent! You are actively engaged in achieving your own goals and learning new skills, and you effectively seek help for your own personal development. Having a strong IA self helps you to feel like you are living up to your full potential and making a meaningful contribution to the world. This adds to a sense of self-confidence in your abilities and skills, you feel proud of your accomplishments, and celebrated by those who

support you.

- **3 points:** Good. You have a solid approach to achieving personal goals and learning new skills, with occasional seeking of help.
- **2 points:** Needs improvement. You would benefit from more regular goal setting, skill development, and more social support for your dreams. You have a hard time “making space” for your own achievements and may be shying away from asking others to contribute to your personal development. This may be resulting in loss of self-esteem, meaning, and fulfillment.
- **1 point:** Deficiency. You are not placing your own dreams of success as a high priority and are hesitant to ask others for accommodation for your personal development. This is likely depleting your sense of meaningful contribution to the world and lowering your feelings of creativity and pride for realizing your true potential. Low IA fulfillment can lead to a sense of emptiness, loss of self-confidence, alienation, and apathy. Consider placing more importance on personal goal achievement, skill development, and reaching for your dreams of success. Try asking for practical help and accepting praise from those who could support you. Remember, your dreams are important, and they deserve space in your life!

2. Questions for External Achievement Needs:

2.1. How often do you contribute to the success and accomplishments of other people?

1 = less than once per month

2 = once per month

3 = once per week

4 = several times per week

5 = daily

2.2. How fair and balanced is the workload of your domestic partnerships?

1 = I do much less than my share

2 = I do somewhat less than my share

3 = the work and responsibilities are equal

4 = I do somewhat more than my share

5 = I do much more than my share

2.3. How fair and balanced is the workload with your co-workers and teammates?

1 = I do much less than my share

2 = I do somewhat less than my share

3 = the work and responsibilities are equal

4 = I do somewhat more than my share

5 = I do much more than my share

2.4. How often do you participate in volunteer activities that make an impact in your community?

1 = never

2 = rarely

3 = a few hours per year

4 = several hours per month

5 = several hours per week

Scoring:

Add up your scores for the questions in this section and divide by 4.

Assessment:

- **4 to 5 points:** Excellent! You do more than your share when it comes to team projects, domestic and official partnerships, and community service. You are always there to lend a practical hand, and you give all you've got to making sure the objectives of your team and social group are being realized. This helps you feel a sense of "doing-based" pride and self-assuredness for your contribution. Other people likely have a high degree of trust and respect for how much you do for them. They bond with you because you are so reliable and attuned to the practical assistance they need, and that strengthens your relationships.
- **3 points:** Good. You give a solid contribution to the partnerships and shared goals of the social group.
- **2 points:** Needs improvement. You could benefit from considering ways you can contribute more to helping others achieve their goals, giving more work to social and team projects.
- **1 point:** Deficiency. You should try to be more

attuned and nurturing to the goals of others and give more to your team and domestic partnerships. Low EA fulfillment could be sapping your sense of pride in contribution, and other people are likely feeling the effects of you not helping enough. By driving more energy outward to helping your social circle, you can increase the amount of trust and reliance other people will have in you. This will also help decrease the negative conflicts or lost opportunities that are likely resulting from you not pulling your weight toward shared goals.

3. Questions for Internal Experiential Needs:

3.1. How often do you take time to pursue non-productive but personally enjoyable activities?

- 1 = less than once per month
- 2 = once per month
- 3 = once per week
- 4 = several times per week
- 5 = daily

3.2. To what degree do you feel guilty or uncomfortable for spending time, money, resources, or effort on things that are just for your own pleasure?

- 1 = so uncomfortable I never do it
- 2 = very uncomfortable
- 3 = moderately uncomfortable
- 4 = a little uncomfortable
- 5 = not at all uncomfortable

3.3. How much does your self-worth hinge on productivity and success?

1 = entirely

2 = a great deal

3 = moderately

4 = only a little

5 = I feel very worthy just for being me

3.4. How much do you rely on other people to rejuvenate, entertain, comfort, or reassure you?

1 = not at all

2 = rarely

3 = somewhat

4 = a good amount

5 = a great deal

Scoring:

Add up your scores for the questions in this section and divide by 4.

Assessment:

- **4 to 5 points:** Excellent! You take the time to nurture your being-based self and are not afraid to ask for this nurturing from other people. Your needs for fun, entertainment, comfort, solace, and restoration are being met because you place a high priority on them. This helps you have a strong sense of worth just for who you are, independent of the accomplishments you make in life. Such IE fulfillment also helps people bond with you, it helps you trust others, it buffers from

negative life events, and is vital for sustaining healthy self-concept and self-care.

- **3 points:** Good. You give a solid amount of energy to your internal experiential needs. You take time to have fun, relax, and enjoy life, and invite others to participate in that with you.
- **2 points:** Needs improvement. You could benefit from putting more energy into your internal experiential needs. It's rather hard for you to ask for help, and you feel reluctant to indulge in things that are just for you.
- **1 point:** Deficiency. Your sense of self-worth hinges heavily on your successes and achievements, but you are overlooking your being-based worth. You resist attending to needs that are just for your own enjoyment, and you don't let others take enough care of you. With such low IE nurturing, it is hard to heal from psychological wounds, relationship intimacy declines, and your sense of personal value is jeopardized. If these needs are depleted enough, it will cause self-destructive behaviors, depression, anxiety, and it's harder to heal from psychological injuries. You will come to resent yourself for even needing fun, relaxation, and comfort, and this erases the most important pillar of your psychological health.

4. Questions for External Experiential Needs:

4.1. In a social setting, how much effort and attention do you put into creating a positive experience for

others?

1 = none, it's all about me

2 = a little

3 = a moderate amount

4 = a great deal

5 = most of my attention and effort goes to the other person's experience

4.2. When other people ask for emotional comfort, or show signs of emotional distress, how responsive are you to those requests?

1 = not at all

2 = a little

3 = moderately

4 = a great deal

5 = full responsiveness, I obsess over it

4.3. How much time do you spend engaging in the activities, celebrations, and experiential priorities of your family, friend, and community networks?

1 = never, I'm all about my own priorities

2 = rarely

3 = I participate sometimes

4 = I participate most of the time

5 = I take every chance I get

4.4. When another person confronts you about having hurt their feelings, offended, or neglected one of their experiential needs, how do you respond?

1 = I get defensive and figure out a way to make the other person feel bad

2 = I'm resistant to hear it, but if they've got a point, I'll

listen

3 = It's not comfortable, but I do it

4 = I'm ready for feedback, able to make changes as needed

5 = I'm obsessed with feedback and always looking for ways I can do better

Scoring:

Add up your scores for the questions in this section and divide by 4.

Assessment:

- **4 to 5 points:** Excellent! You put a high priority on nurturing other people's emotions, their needs for fun, entertainment, comfort, solace, celebration, and restoration. You are very conscientious about making improvements and adapting to the changing experiential needs of your social group, and you have a lot of empathy for what makes others happy. People in your life hold a high degree of emotional trust and intimate bonding with you because you are so kind and attentive to their being-based selves.
- **3 points:** Good. You give a solid amount of energy to your external experiential needs, to creating fun, relaxation, and enjoyment in people around you.
- **2 points:** Needs improvement. You could benefit from putting more energy into your external experiential needs. Try giving more effort to

social bonding and investing more in emotionally supporting your relationships.

- **1 point:** Your external experiential needs are in deficit. Although you might not be feeling this inside, other people in your social circle are likely struggling because you lack emotional attunement. Low IE fulfillment will cause others to lose emotional trust in you, triggering negative conflict and estrangement. Your social circle can be harmed, and the intimacy of your relationships will decline if you continue to neglect your external experiential needs.

Exclusive Insights and Tips

Expert Tips from Brett McDonald

As the author of Thermodynamic Psychology, I am excited to share exclusive tips and insights on how to apply the axis of needs in everyday life.

These strategies are designed to help you mindfully attend to the categories of psychological and social health, protect your needs from neglect or harm, and sustain the best mental and relationship functioning.

Fulfilling Internal Achievement (IA) Needs

- **Tip 1:** Take time to reflect on your higher calling, your drives for creativity, your potential for personal accomplishment. Identify the top three achievements that would bring you unique meaning, make you passionate, curious, and inspired to reach for greater self-actualization.
- **Tip 2:** For each internal achievement you listed above, write 2-3 actions or sub-goals that would create progress toward those dreams. Include steps you are ready to do now, no matter how small.
- **Tip 3:** Identify and challenge thoughts and beliefs that get in the way of your goals for internal achievement. These could include unrealistic role obligations, guilt, imbalanced priorities, lack of confidence, flawed assumptions, or insecurities.

- **Tip 4:** Who can help? Make a list of people in your social group who can provide resources, encouragement, praise, and other kinds of support. Invite others to contribute, and coach them on how they can contribute to your internal achievement goals.

Fulfilling External Achievement (EA) Needs

- **Tip 1:** External needs are a bit harder to gauge than internal needs, because they are held by other people, so gaining information is key. The first step involves asking those in your domestic, career, organizational, and community partnerships to describe how you can be helpful to their goals. Find out whether you are upholding your share of the work, and ways you can improve your contribution.
- **Tip 2:** Make sure you receive feedback openly and non-defensively. External achievement fulfillment involves constant feedback, trial and error, while challenging yourself to be “coachable” by others.
- **Tip 3:** Make a list of goals that would promote the productive outcomes sought by your social circle. This might include volunteering, more community service, setting aside time to serve others, celebrating the successes of those around you, and engaging more in team efforts. Start with small, manageable steps and work your way up.

Fulfilling Internal Experiential (IE) Needs

- **Tip 1:** Of all the categories of psychological need, the internal experiential is the most pivotal to our mental health, and it's the one we tend to neglect the most. We are often taught that internal experiential needs are the most “expendable” and should be placed at a lower priority than needs that are for other people or for accomplishment. Make a list of beliefs and thoughts that might cause you to minimize your internal experiential needs and challenge those mindsets.
- **Tip 2:** Work on being vulnerable and open to receiving care, comfort, and emotional support. You sometimes have to force yourself to share your needs, and be receptive to the kindness, nurturing, support, and love others have to give you. Try your best to coach your social circle so their efforts are most fulfilling to you.
- **Tip 3:** If you can't think of anything you would like to do for fun or relaxation, simply “do nothing” for at least 30 minutes per day. As you make the energy available, it will naturally lead you to attune to your internal experiential needs.
- **Tip 4:** Make a list of the “just for me” activities that could bring you pleasure and start plugging them into your schedule at least once per day. Try involving other people in these targets. Depending on how neglected your internal experiential needs are, this may take a while to work up to, so start small and build as you go.

Fulfilling External Experiential (EE) Needs

- **Tip 1:** Sometimes external experiential needs are unmet because a person simply doesn't socialize enough. If this is the case for you, make unstructured time to be available to people you care about.
- **Tip 2:** Sometimes external experiential needs are unmet because you are focusing too much on other need categories. Try making more space for things that are fun, enjoyable, relaxing, or comforting to other people.
- **Tip 3:** Ask people in your social circle to give you feedback about ways you can be more experientially nurturing, and ways you can prevent hurting their feelings. Try to be as open and non-defensive as possible and make the asked-for changes. This will build their trust in you, and they will open up about additional ways you can nurture their experiential needs.

These are practical and actionable steps toward making Thermodynamic Psychology work in your personal and professional life, so you can gain a better sense of self-worth, social connection, meaning, and functionality.