

# Loneliness & Human Social Needs

Understanding the NEED for social connection and the pain of social exclusion.

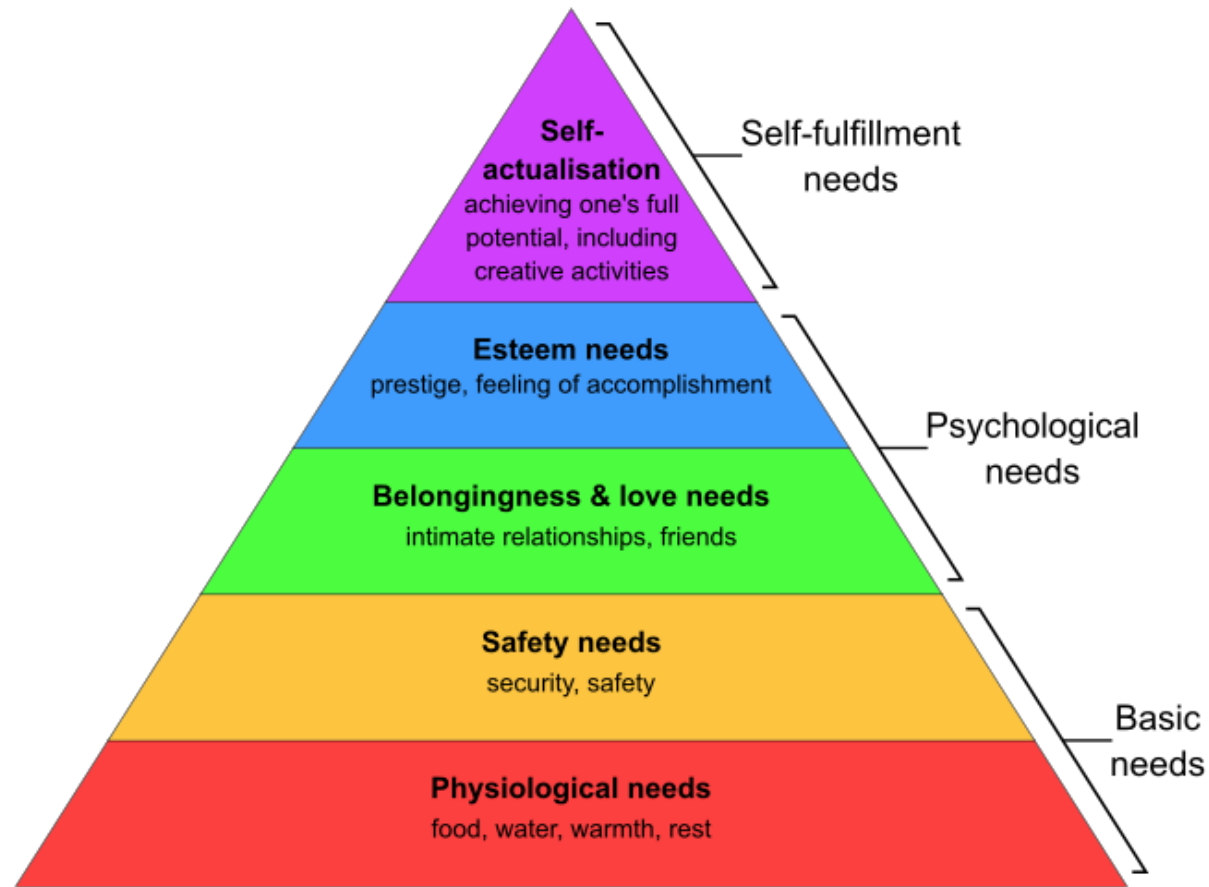
# Altruism and Helping Others feeling good

- Altruism is thought to be the actions we take that offer no direct benefit for us.
- Is it selfless and altruistic if we get a reward?
  - Higher self-regard from the group;
  - Positive feelings;
  - Positive self-image;
- Positive feelings might motivate us to do good deed for others, show empathy and compassion.

# Implications New Research Findings

- Research shows that humans NEED connections – meaningful social relationships
- Prior theories held that social needs were pursued or only needed after we first satisfy our needs for food, water, safety and related needs.

# Social Research and Its implications





# Social Research and Its Implications

- Some of this research is congruent with what I have felt and believed to be true but different than what we are taught.
- We are taught or socialized that we must love ourselves and be comfortable alone in order to be able to form healthy relationships.
- Psychologists and Neuroscientists knew about the attachment needs of infants beginning at birth and how it relates to survival, but we didn't know how this need continues throughout life.
- We are instinctually driven to form relationships and to be connected to others.

# Survival and Social Pain

- Rejection, loss, public humiliation, social exclusion are experienced in the brain in the same way that physical pain is experienced.
- Drugs that combat physical pain can help us to deal with social pain – e.g., Tylenol (Acetaminophen).
- Survival historically has been related to being connected to others – a group, a family, etc. This has translated into an instinct.
- A person experiencing grief will describe a real sense of “pain” throughout their body.
- Why do we tell or want people to get over it?

# Oxytocin (Hormone) and Reward Centers of the Brain

- Oxytocin is the “love hormone” which is released by mothers (not just humans) around the birth of a child to build a connection;
- this is released by caressing, cuddling, holding hands – promotes a sense of wellness, decreased depression and anxiety/stress.
- Dopamine is released by reward centers of the brain – this is more about emotional or physiological “highs.”
- Receiving praise from others activates the reward centers of the brain.
- Helping others can make us feel good physiologically

# Self and Others

- If we are social creatures, can we improve ourselves, our self worth, our self-love, on our own?
- This seems to be the expectation, but it doesn't stand up to reason.
- When we are lonely some people look for ways to help others and it feels good.
- Our sense of self is directly informed by the feedback we get from others in our environment contradicting the notion that we decide alone who we are.
- There are dangers to conformity and an Us vs. Them attitude.



# Empathy and Theory of Mind

- Theory of Mind is the understanding that other people have their own minds with different perspectives, knowledge, likes and dislikes, views;
- We aren't born with this, but we develop it at a young age, i.e., by age 5.
- Prior to having a theory of mind, very young children do not understand that others have different knowledge (just one demonstration of this).
- Experimenters as children where a subject will look for an object that has been moved after the subject left the room. Very young children fail at this task believing that the subject will look for the item in the same place they would look – they don't understand that the subject didn't see the object being moved.

# Social Brains

- The brains of humans more than any other mammal have put a premium on social intelligence;
- Human brains or minds when not doing other cognitive tasks are by default working out social ideas – our place in society, groups, our relationships.
- Humans try to predict other people's behaviors and to engage in mind reading- understanding what another person is thinking.

# Personal anecdote

- Parents were narcissistic and did not provide emotional support.
- Changes in my own sense of self-esteem, self-worth, mental health, happiness, self-love came from relationships – this would not and could not have happened on my own or without these relationships.
- Loss/grief felt like my own death and reversed the gains made.
- Maybe when asked if one needs to be in a relationship to be happy, the answer is “yes.”

# The Value of a Support Group

- Giving and receiving of empathy, compassion and creating a sense of “connection” to others.
- The altruistic “reward” or positive feelings of helping others.
- Often the personal need to know that what I am doing is helpful is not a statement of insecurity but a request for knowledge of what works and what doesn’t work or help.
- By giving to each other, we can all experience these same “rewards” and “strokes” – where strokes are not necessarily physical.