



## SOCIAL

### Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect

by Matthew D. Lieberman

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Lieberman (Psychology, Psychiatry, and Biobehavioral Sciences/UCLA) offers scientific evidence to counter the idea that the need to survive and reproduce is the fundamental driver of human behavior.

The author rejects Abraham Maslow's 1943 formulation of a hierarchy of needs stacked in a pyramid, suggesting that the pyramid is upside down. Physiological needs and safety are at the bottom, followed by social needs and esteem, which Lieberman describes as “the extra scoops of ice cream” and “cherry on top.” He shows countervailing evidence, amassed over the past two decades, that shows social needs to be as basic as their physiological counterparts. Using MRI, the author and his associates have identified a separate area of the brain in which social cognition occurs. It is activated when we “think about other people's minds...[and] promotes understanding and empathy, cooperation, and consideration.” Along with the capacity for empathy provided by mirror neurons, which we share with other species, it is the part of the brain that we use when we think “about the social world and our place in it.” It also allows us to function effectively in the larger social groups that are typical of human societies, as compared to other primates, and to function collectively in more complex ways. Mammalian young depend on a caretaker from the moment of their birth in order to survive. “Our need for connection is the bedrock upon which the others are built,” writes the author. Empathy, love and our need for social connections follow.

A fascinating explanation of why “a broken heart can feel as painful as a broken leg” and social recognition is frequently prized above money.