

Mental Health Matters

Every month CARP Halton will feature a Mental Health segment. This segment will feature information to enrich your Mental Health understanding.

“Humans are wired for social connections because these connections have helped us to survive and reproduce successfully over the course of our evolutionary history,” Silk said in the essay. “Even in a world in which we can order groceries on the internet and work remotely, we depend on our connections to others for our well-being.”

The Regents Professor has studied baboons for over four decades, specifically female baboon social relationships. In “The natural history of social bonds,” Silk synthesizes decades of scientific data showing how group living and social connections affect different mammals and why evolution sometimes favours social connectedness.

“I was trained as an anthropologist, and anthropologists are interested partly in humans and in how and why we are the way we are,” said Silk, a research scientist at the ASU Institute of Human Origins and Regents Professor at the School of Human Evolution and Social Change. “One of the distinctive features of humans is how intensely social we are. We all live in societies. We all live in groups of others, family, friends and colleagues. One of the questions then is, what are the benefits of being social?”

Silk points to studies about animals, showing that social bonds and living with others can help alleviate stress, offer protection from predators, provide services like grooming and babysitting, release oxytocin, and even boost longevity. When some animals lose a partner, it negatively affects their heart rate and cortisol levels.

Animals living in groups are more prone to disease and have to compete for food and mates. But for most, including humans, it appears that the good of living with others outweighs the bad.

“Social connections remain important to us because they enable us to function effectively in society as mates, parents, partners, colleagues, friends, neighbours and citizens,” said Silk.¹

¹ Arizona State University, Joan Silk