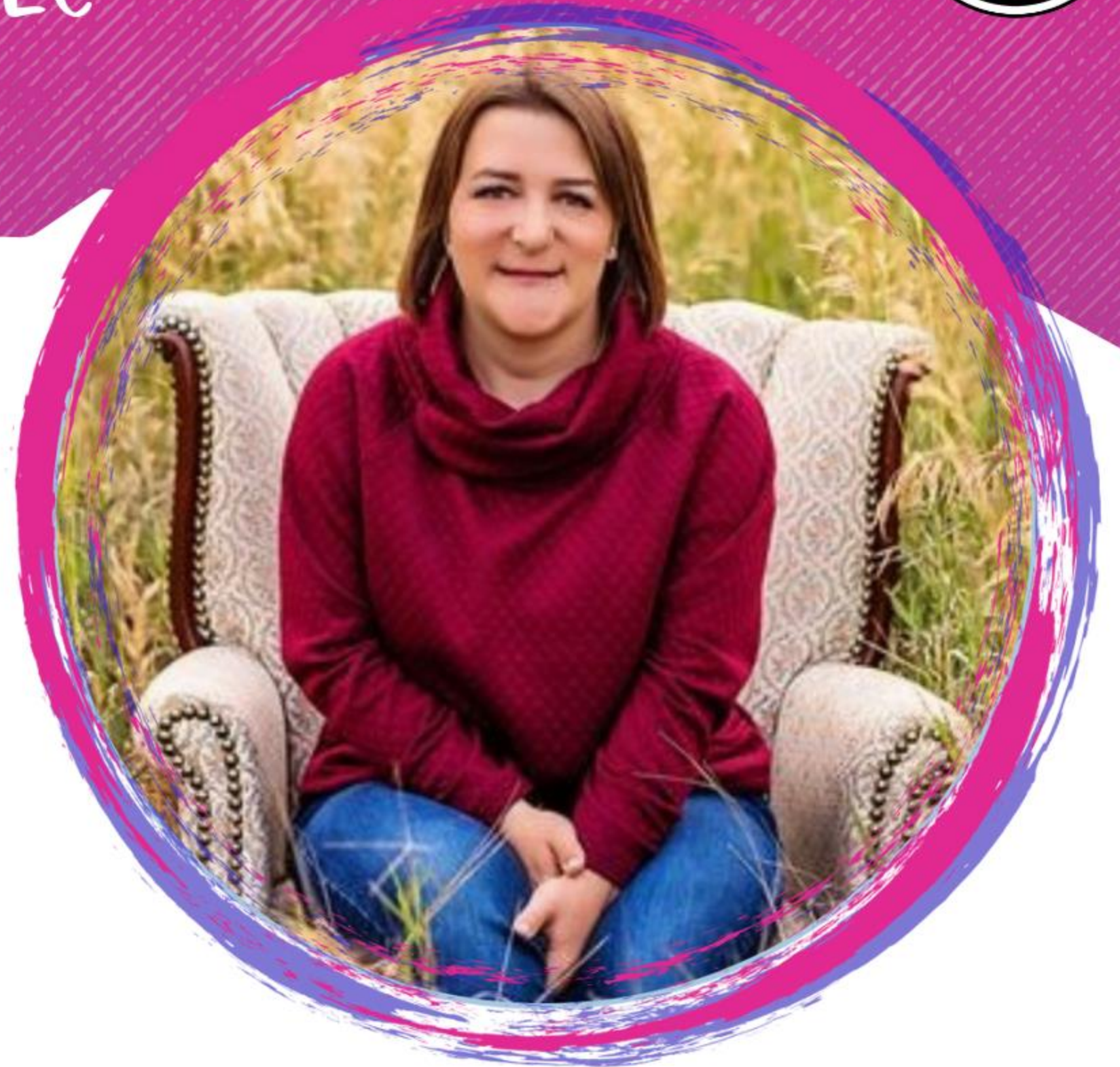


Molly Hutchinson, SWLC



Connected But Alone: How the Internet Fuels Suicide Risks



2025



CONNECTED BUT ALONE: HOW THE INTERNET FUELS SUICIDE RISKS

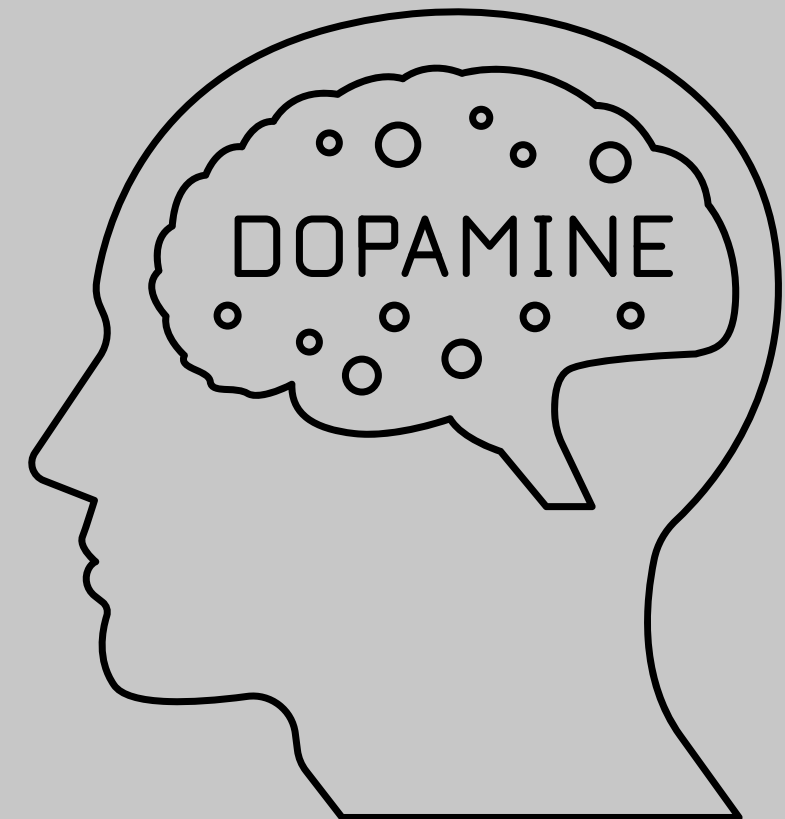
PRESENTED BY: MOLLY
HUTCHINSON

The Science of Emotional Responses

Oxytocin: Associated with trust, bonding, and deeper emotional connection.



Dopamine: Linked to instant gratification and reward-seeking behavior.





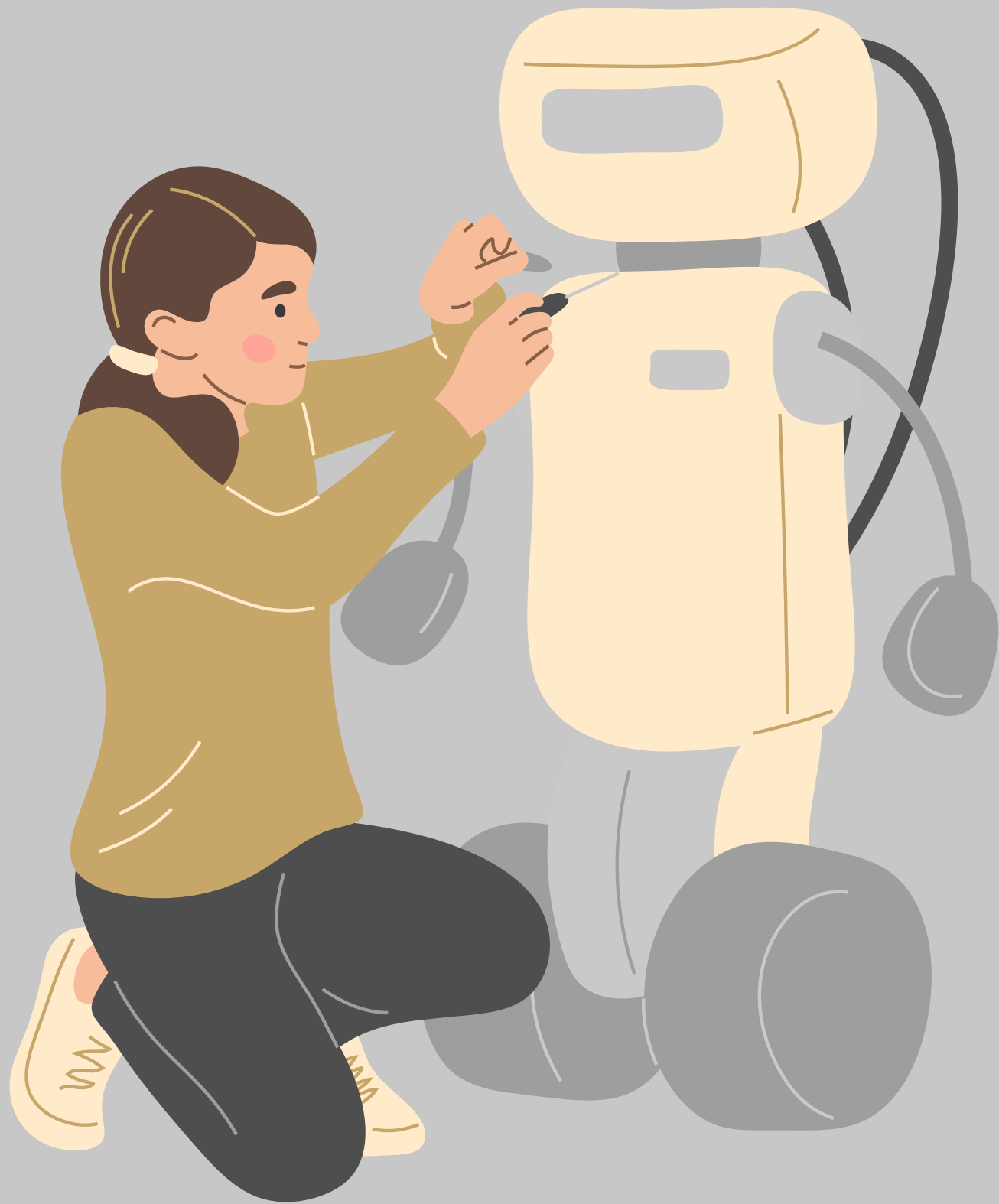
Online Interactions – The Dopamine Effect

- Online interactions (likes, comments, messages) trigger dopamine spikes.
- The effect is short-lived and can lead to craving more digital engagement.
- Can contribute to social media addiction and dopamine fatigue.

In-Person Interactions – The Oxytocin Boost

- Face-to-face connections release oxytocin, promoting trust and deeper relationships.
- Physical touch, eye contact, and shared experiences strengthen emotional bonds.
- Long-term benefits: Reduced stress, increased happiness, and social well-being.





Key Differences Between Online & In-Person Responses

Factor	In-Person (Oxytocin & Dopamine)	Online (Dopamine-Driven)
Neurochemical Triggered	Oxytocin & Dopamine	Primarily Dopamine
Emotional Impact	Deep, lasting emotional bonds	Instant but short-lived gratification
Social Effect	Strengthens trust, reduces stress	Can lead to social comparison & anxiety
Connection Type	Genuine, face-to-face interactions	Superficial, screen-based validation
Physical Cues	Eye contact, touch, body language	Emojis, text, and video-based cues
Longevity of Effect	Long-term emotional fulfillment	Temporary mood boost, can lead to addiction
Risk Factors	Encourages emotional support & empathy	Can increase isolation, impulsivity, and addiction tendencies

THE DIGITAL AGE AND SUICIDE RISK

Over the past five years, digital communication has experienced significant growth

Global Internet Usage:

- As of February 2025, there are 5.56 billion internet users worldwide, representing 67.9% of the global population. [Statista](#)

Social Media Adoption:

- In 2020, there were more than 3.6 billion social media users globally, with projections estimating an increase to 4.41 billion by 2025. [PMC](#)
- As of 2025, there are an estimated 5.42 billion social media users worldwide, representing 63.9% of the global population, and the average user spends about 2 hours and 21 minutes on social media daily.

HOW DOES IT CONTRIBUTE TO SUICIDE RISK

Cyberbullying and Emotional Distress:

- Frequent social media use has been associated with higher prevalence of electronic bullying victimization and persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness among adolescents. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that these factors contribute to increased suicide risk.
- online interactions can worsen feelings of isolation and despair.

The role of anonymity and curated content (unrealistic comparisons, pressure to fit in).

Content Viewed

- Engaging in suicide-related internet use has been linked to higher levels of suicidal intent. A study in BMC Psychiatry found that individuals who accessed suicide-related content online exhibited greater suicidal intent, underscoring the importance of monitoring online behaviors during risk assessments. [PMC](#)
- immediate access to harmful content (e.g., graphic images, discussions).

Problematic Internet Use and Suicidality:

- Studies have identified that problematic or excessive internet use is associated with higher risks of suicidal ideation and behaviors. For instance, a study published in the Journal of Affective Disorders found that problematic internet use serves as a detrimental risk factor for suicidality and self-injurious behavior, increasing the likelihood of such outcomes.
- Internet usage accelerates impulsivity

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA CAN SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH (WHEN USED RESPONSIBLY)

Increased Access to Mental Health Resources

- Social media connects users to crisis hotlines (e.g., 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, Crisis Text Line) and AI-driven mental health chatbots (e.g., Woebot, Wysa).
- Platforms detect distressing content and redirect users to support services.

Building Supportive Communities & Reducing Stigma

- Online peer support groups provide safe spaces for connection and encouragement.
- Mental health awareness campaigns (#EndTheStigma) normalize conversations and promote help-seeking behavior.

Spreading Reliable Mental Health Education

- Verified mental health professionals share evidence-based advice via platforms like TikTok and YouTube.
- Educational content helps combat misinformation and empowers users with coping strategies

Recommendations for Change

- ENHANCE DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES – INCREASE ACCESS TO AI-DRIVEN MENTAL HEALTH CHATBOTS, CRISIS INTERVENTION SERVICES, AND ONLINE THERAPY PLATFORMS TO PROVIDE IMMEDIATE SUPPORT FOR THOSE IN DISTRESS.
- Regulate Harmful Online Content – Strengthen policies to detect and remove cyberbullying, harmful comparison culture, and suicide-related content while promoting positive mental health messaging.
- Promote Digital Literacy & Healthy Tech Use – Educate individuals, especially youth, on the psychological effects of social media, encourage mindful screen time, and foster in-person social connections to reduce isolation.

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QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS?

