

Moral Injury within the Mental Health System

Navigating complex systems while fighting for those we serve

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Introduction



Caption

Moral Injury In Social Work

Obligatory Objectives

- 1. Define Moral Injury in the context of the Social Work profession*
- 2. Identify at least one new way to heal from personal moral injury.*
- 3. Identify at least one resource that can provide support if moral injury is experienced in the future.*

Moral Injury In Social Work

- ✿ *In the Military*
- ✿ *In First Responders*
- ✿ *In Addiction*
- ✿ *In the Work Place*



Moral Injury In Social Work

Definition: Moral injury is the damage done to one's conscience or moral compass when that person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress one's own moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conduct.

~Syracuse University: Moral Injury Project



Moral Injury In Social Work

Professional speak: Ethical Dilemma



Moral Injury In Social Work

Acts of Commission: Doing something that goes against your ethics, values, morals.



Moral Injury In Social Work

Acts of Commission:

- Remove a child from a home when the system is the problem, not the parent
- Documenting part of story that court uses against them
- Putting a client's document in the wrong file
- Premature discharge
- Lesser of two evils decision

Moral Injury In Social Work

Acts of Omission: Failing to prevent something that violates your ethics, values, or morals.



Moral Injury In Social Work

Acts of Omission:

- Witnessing a colleague mistreat a client and staying silent
- Sitting in a team meeting listening to “labeling”
- Leaving out information in documentation because you know it will hurt their court case or effect their work status

Moral Injury In Social Work

Betrayal: Betrayed by a person or an institution in a high-stakes situation



Moral Injury In Social Work

Betrayal:

- An agency promising resources to a family and then cutting funding, leaving the social worker to deliver the news
- Moving to a new job, abandoning your current service participants
- Telling a client that another therapist would be better suited to help them after you have worked with them for 4 years
- Administration worked hard for a person to be admitted to the program, then changes their mind, leaving you to manage the emotional aftermath

Moral Injury In Social Work

Internalized: Creating personal standards that extend beyond what is humanly possible. Holding ourselves to those standards. Then suffer in silence, becoming overwhelmed in pain and shame, exacerbated by self imposed guilt.



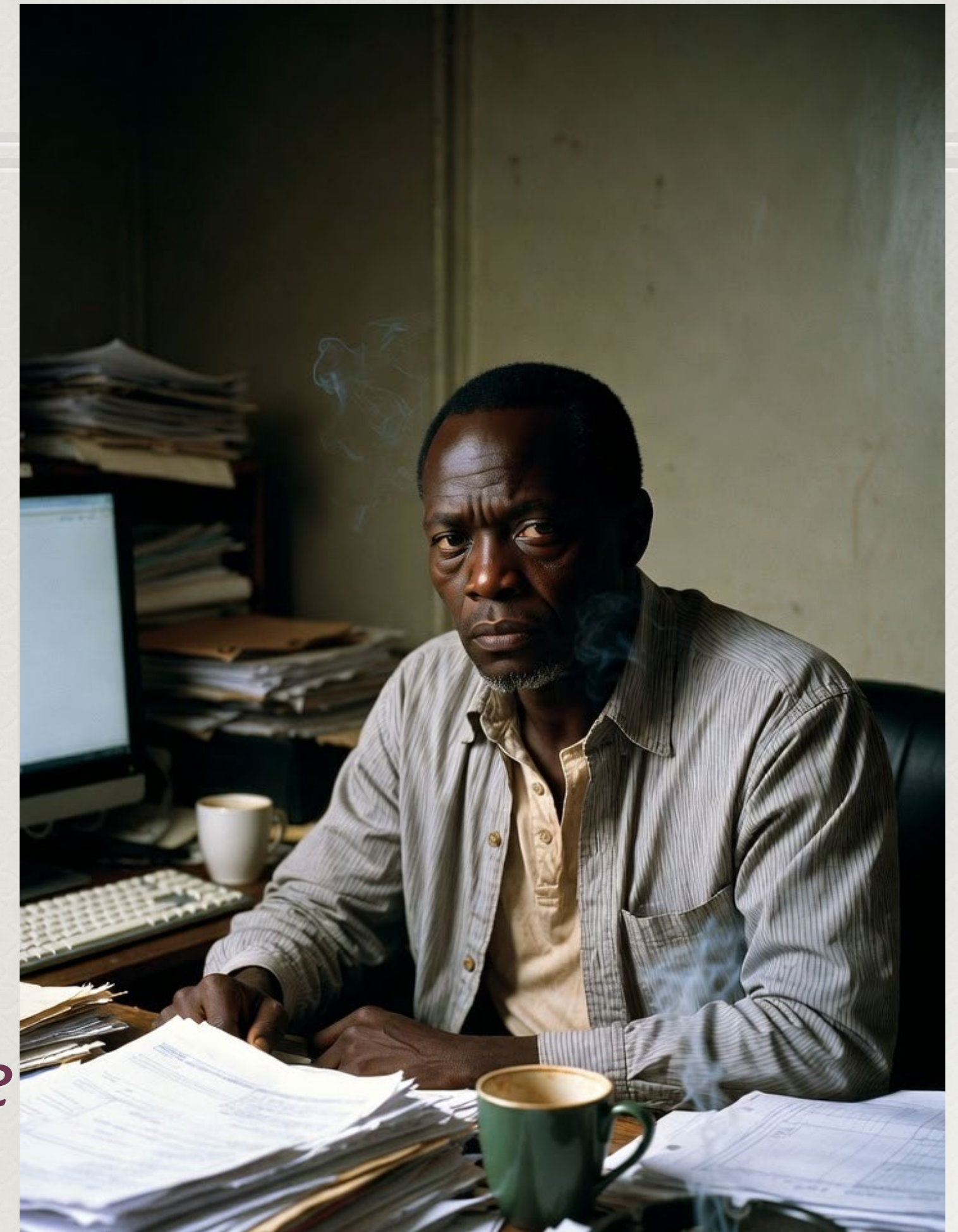
Moral Injury In Social Work

Internalized:

- Personal Trauma
- Value system that has not been examined
- Rigid thinking
- Low self esteem/imposter syndrome

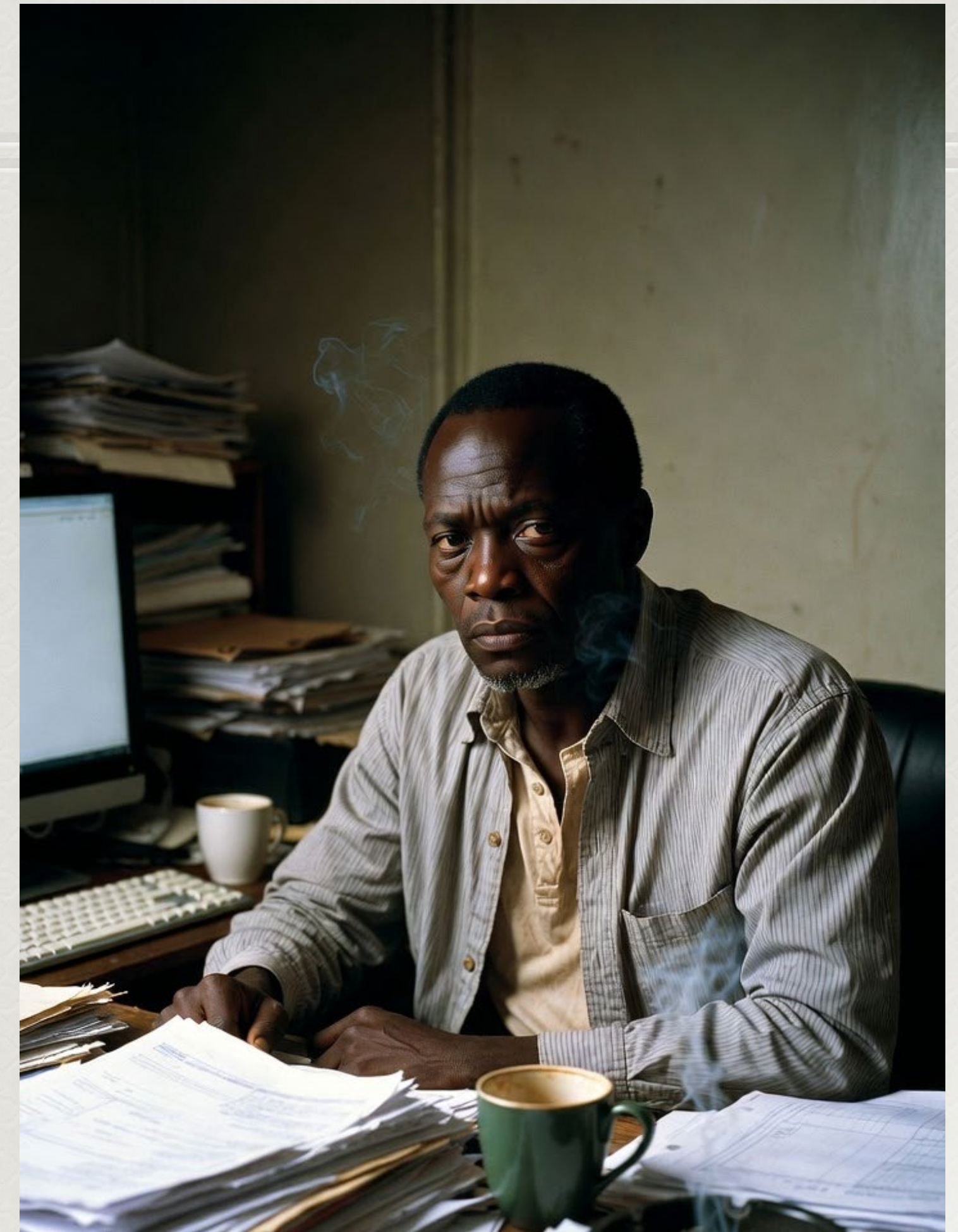
Symptoms of Moral Injury

- *Anhedonia: Losing the ability to feel joy in the work.*
- *Cynicism: A deep "us vs. them" mentality toward the agency or the system.*
- *Isolation: Feeling that colleagues, family, or friends wouldn't understand the thing you experienced.*
- *Loss of Faith: Not in religion, but in the idea that the world is a just place.*



Symptoms of Moral Injury

- Memory issues in small things: *You miss small details you didn't use to.*
- Double booking appointments
- Avoidance: *Doom Scrolling, scheduling client interaction during team meetings*
- Substance use as a coping mechanism

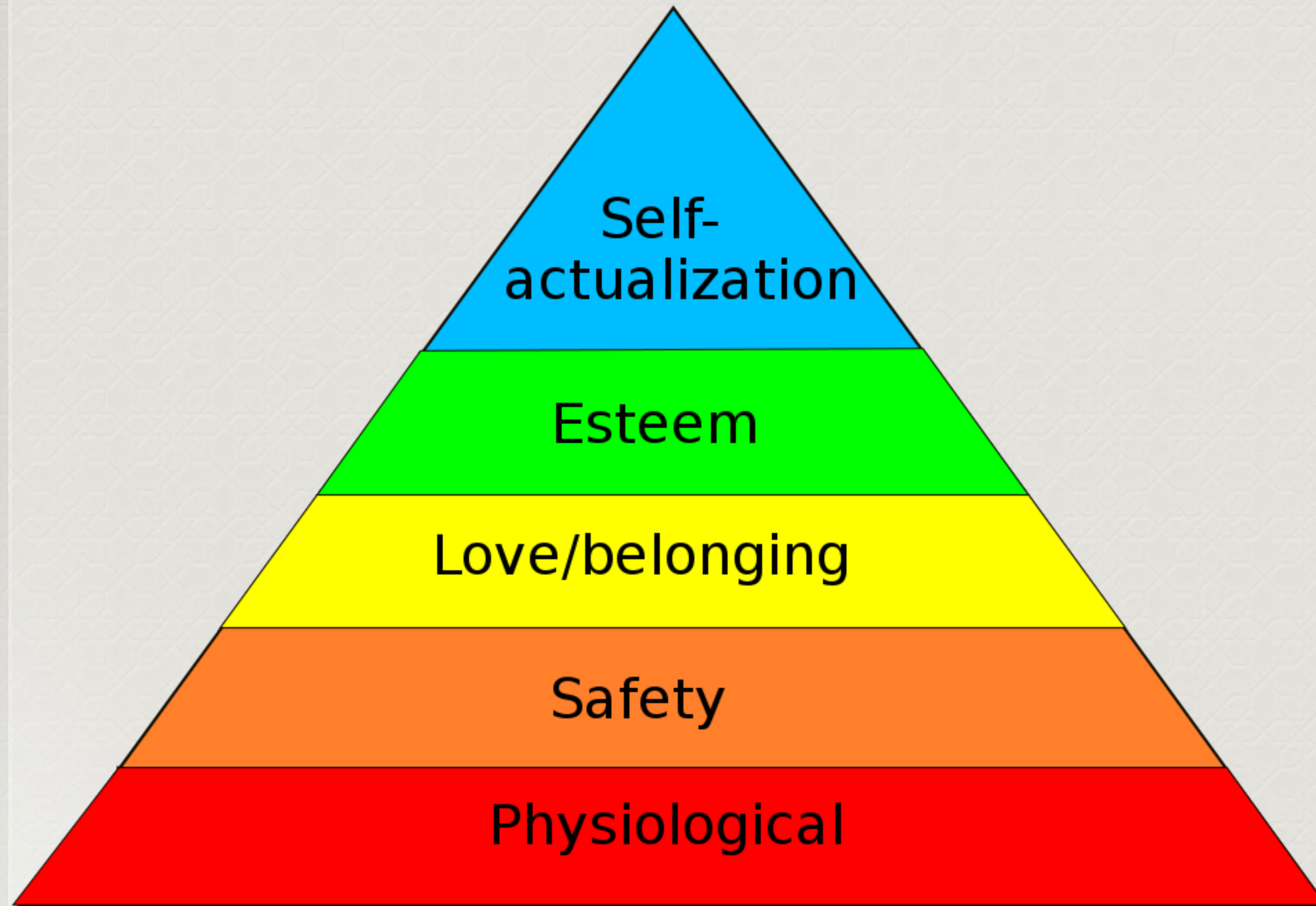




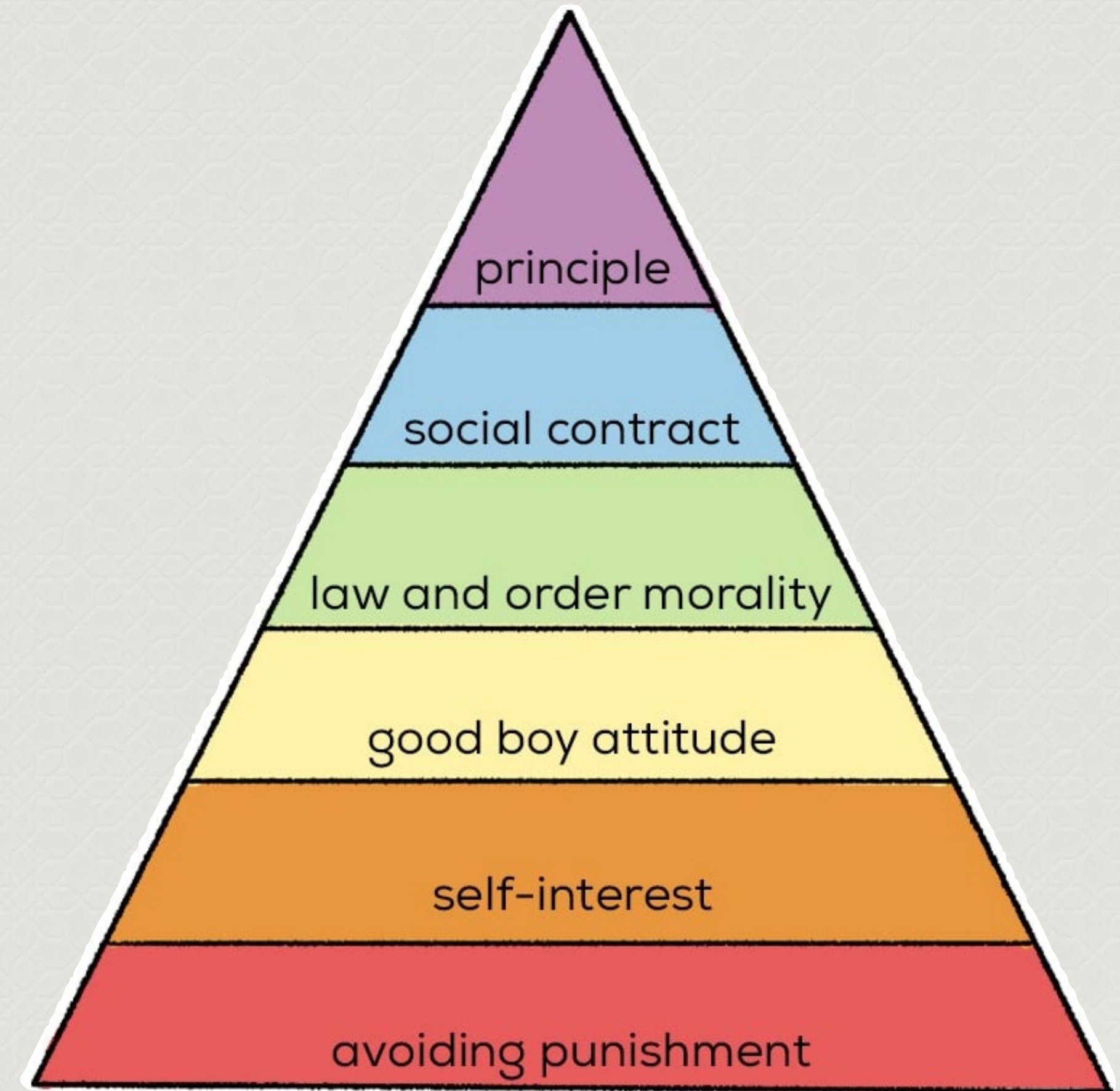
Perspectives of Moral Injury

Moral Injury vs PTSD(I)

| | PTSI | Moral Injury |
|------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Primary Emotion | Fear, Anger, Anxiety | Shame, Guilt, Betrayal |
| The "Trigger" | Threat to physical safety | Threat to moral integrity |
| Core Belief | "The world is dangerous." | "I am a bad person" or "I help the evil system." |
| Treatment Focus | Safety and desensitization | Self forgiveness, grief, and meaning-making |

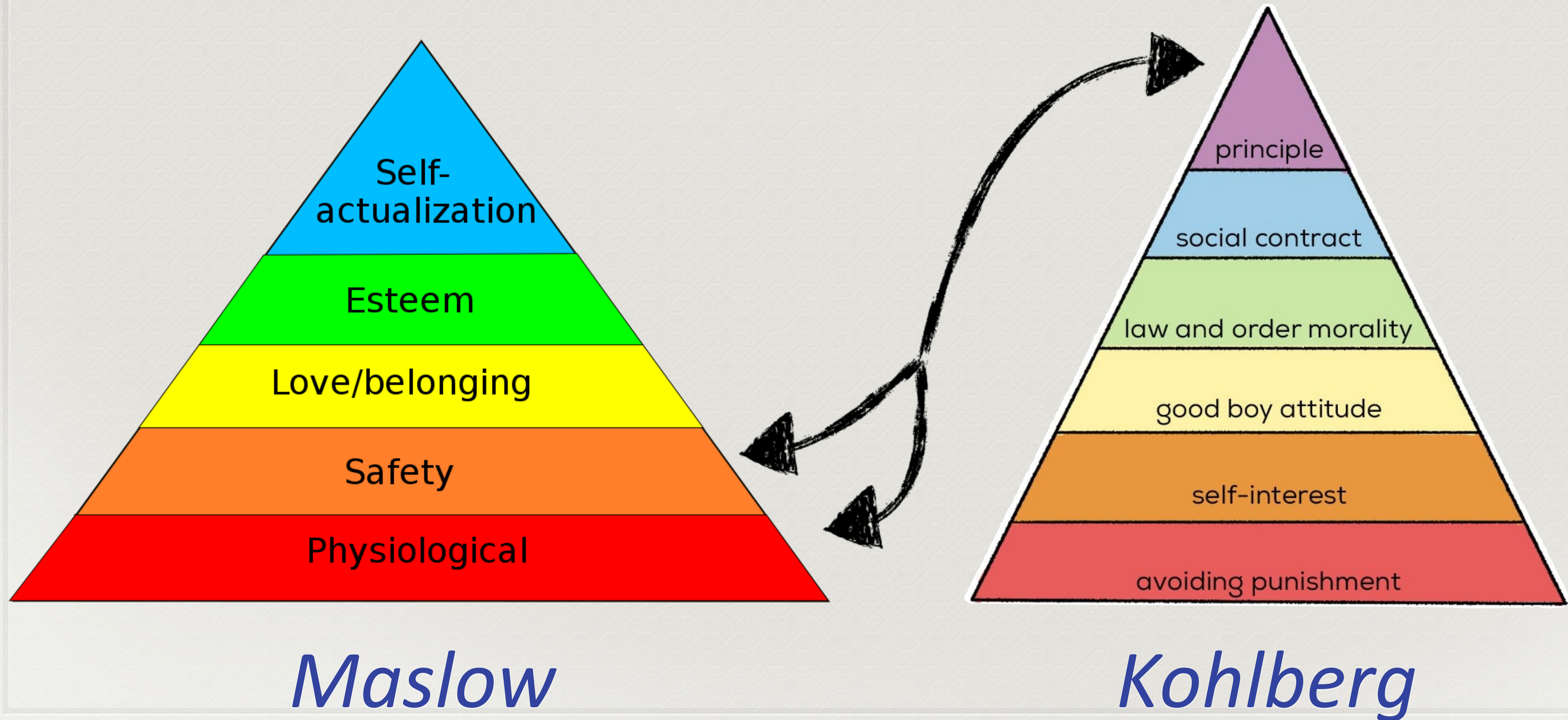


Maslow



Kohlberg

Moral Injury occurs when a person is forced down the Maslow pyramid while their values remain at the top of the Kohlberg pyramid.



**Moral Injury can happen
when working to fill this**

gap



Supervisor/Organizational Needs

Client Needs

Social Worker



Internal Workings of a Social Worker

Social Work Core Value

- *Dignity and Worth of the individual*
- *Self?*
- *When self is excluded, internal conflict erupts*



Is it ethical to exclude ourselves from the same level of compassion, grace, acceptance, value, and unconditional positive regard that we endeavor to extend to those we serve?

What would it be like if we treated others in the same way we treat ourselves?

Would that be ethical?



Showing Up For Ourselves

Navigating Moral Injury In Social Work

Surviving is often promoted as the pinnacle of healing.

Therapist Uncensored Episode 197



Navigating Moral Injury In Social Work: Personal Resources

- 1. Regular self gratitude*
- 2. Professional friendships that are mutually supportive*
- 3. Professional and personal mentorship*
- 4. Rest*
- 5. Self grace and Self forgiveness*

Social workers have a super power.

Our voice

Power ≠ influence

Empowerment In Social Work: Use Your Voice

- *Doctors*
- *Law Makers*
- *Supervisors*
- *Family*
- *Funding sources*
- *Negative self talk*
- *Friends*
- *Policy Makers*

Empowerment In Social Work: Use Your Voice

OURSELVES

Success in Social Work

Be a Lifeguard.

Take care of yourself first! Taking care of yourself is the only way you will be able to help others, many others.

