

On Empathy II

Penn Jillette shared some fascinating insight recently. Do we not have a natural propensity to be deeply affected by the emotions experienced and portrayed by others right in front of us? Do we not want to either reach out and hold them, to soothe them or on the other end, to smile and to dance with them? Imagine the ability to view someone suffer, in some great way, perhaps someone you know, from behind a sound-proof one-way mirror. Our empathy would be barred, stunted. What if I told you that from an early age we are trained and conditioned to repress this natural propensity due to this barrier? Assuming this is the case, what effect does this have on us as empathetic creatures? Now, you might be wondering what in the world I am talking about. I am talking about something that humanity never experienced until the last century. I am talking about the emergence of witnessing other people's grief or happiness and not having any responsibility for sharing in it. Never before have human beings witnessed other people's emotions that were not right in front of them, that is, not until the invention of video recording devices and the creation of cinema. That's something to think about, and today's two cents.