Empathy

**Chimpanzees are human beings’ closest genetic cousins, and a new study has found that they share our ability to empathize with other members of their species – and that they express this sentiment in much the same way. When a chimp loses a fight or is the victim of aggression from an elder chimp, he’ll run off and sulk, scratching or grooming himself in a display of anxiety. That’s when another chimp will approach to show sympathy, offering a warm hug or a kiss. The expressions of sympathy clearly make the comforted chimp feel better, reducing his display of distress behaviors. The findings are significant, Frans de Waal of the Yerkes Primate Center at Emory University tells Discovery News, because empathy is a complex sentiment – one that monkeys can’t experience and even human children don’t learn until they’re older. *(The Week magazine, July 4-11, 2008)***

**Your most empathetic friend: Dogs really may be man’s best friend – ranking even higher than our fellow humans in empathy. British researchers put pet dogs of different ages and breeds in a room with their owners or a stranger. Then they had the people either hum, talk, or pretend to cry. They found that the dogs responded most strongly to people who cried, submissively nuzzling and licking the crier – the canine version of offering comfort – whether they knew the person or not. Dogs did not respond to the humming, even though researchers thought that the unusual sound “might be likely to pique the dogs’ curiosity,” study author Deborah Custance of the University of London tells DailyMail.co.uk. She says the dogs’ behavior shows how highly attuned they are to human emotions owing to thousands of years of evolution. The better a dog responds to human emotion, the more likely we are to give the animal food and shelter – and ensure that the pet’s genes are passed on to the next generation. “We have selectively bred them to act as our companions,” Custance says. *(The Week magazine, September 21, 2012)***

**It's intuitive that happiness helps create and sustain emotional resilience. But the converse is true, too. Emotional resilience -- knowing how to get through a crisis with a little less despair and a little more sanity and perspective -- can also lead to happiness. Medical studies confirm it. They found that people with a serious crisis (like cancer, spinal cord injury or debilitating pain) who found a higher sense of meaning in their plight also experienced better emotional well-being. How? By switching from nursing their own personal sense of tragedy to encouraging empathy with others who might have it worse. That's why so many volunteers feel deep joy in what they're doing. *(Sari Harrar, in AARP - The Magazine / Real Possibilities)***

**Empathy is not merely the basic principle of artistic creation. It is also the only path by which one can reach the truth about life and society. *(Nagai Kafu)***

**Painkiller dulls empathy: Acetaminophen helps dull the pain of some 52 million Americans each week, but new research suggests it could also blunt their sensitivity to other people's distress. Researchers conducted a series of experiments involving 200 college students to assess the effects of acetaminophen -- an active ingredient in Tylenol and more than 600 other medications -- on their ability to empathize. Participants read eight short stories with wrenching scenarios -- one told of a person who suffered a knife wound that cut to the bone; in another, someone grappled with the death of his father. As it turned out, CNN.com reports, the students who took 1,000 mg of acetaminophen (equivalent to two extra-strength Tylenol tablets) displayed less empathy for people who were enduring an emotionally or physically painful experience. "If you are having an argument with your spouse and you just took acetaminophen, this research suggests you might be less understanding of what you did to hurt your spouse's feelings," says study author Baldwin Way. "We don't know why acetaminophen is having these effects," but it is cause for concern. *(The Week magazine, June 3, 2016)***

**The racial limits of empathy: Empathy, a new study finds, is skin-deep. When people see someone else experiencing pain, they subtly respond as if they, too, have been harmed – a phenomenon called pain empathy. But Italian scientists have found that pain empathy is greatly diminished if the two people belong to different races. In the study, two groups of subjects – one of African descent, the other, Italian – were asked to watch brief videos in which a hand was pricked by a needle. One video showed a white hand being stuck; the other, a black hand. When subjects saw a hand being pricked, they registered a sympathetic pain reaction in sensors placed on their hands – but only if the hand they watched belonged to someone of their own race. Subjects who’d expressed more prejudice in a questionnaire also showed less empathy toward opposite-race hands they saw in the videos. Intriguingly, both whites and blacks reacted empathetically when they saw a purple hand being pricked. “This is quite important, because it suggests that humans tend to empathize by default unless prejudice is at play,” study author Salvatore Aglioti tells CNN.com. Although empathy in the real world is more complex, says co-author Allesio Avenanti, the findings raise the possibility that racial differences might unconsciously hinder the ability of doctors to empathize with some of their patients, “and may contribute to the causes of racial disparities in health care.” (The Week magazine, June 18, 2010)**

**What is empathy? If another fellow strikes it rich and you feel as if it’s money in your pocket, that’s empathy. (Changing Times, The Kiplinger Magazine)**

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