

Empathy

By the time I was twelve, I had progressed from “If he doesn’t get better, he may have to be institutionalized” to “He’s a weird, screwed-up kid.” But although my communication abilities had developed by leaps and bounds, people had ever higher expectations for me, and I began having trouble with what the therapists called “inappropriate expressions.”

One time, my mother had invited her friend Betsy over. I wandered in as they sat on the sofa, smoking cigarettes and talking.

Betsy said, “Did you hear about Eleanor Parker’s son? Last Saturday he got hit by a train and killed. He was playing on the tracks.”

I smiled at her words. She turned to me with a shocked expression on her face. “What! Do you think that’s funny?”

I felt embarrassed and a little humiliated. “No, I guess not,” I said as I slunk away. I didn’t know what to say. I knew they thought it was bad for me to be smiling, but I didn’t know why I was grinning, and I couldn’t help it. I didn’t feel joy or happiness. At the time, as I approached my teenage years, it was hard to figure out exactly what I did feel. And I felt powerless to react any differently.

As I left, I could hear Betsy. “What’s the matter with that boy?”

dwelling on my so-called
all full of it. They didn't make me better. They just made me
worse. None of them figured out why I grinned when I heard
Eleanor's kid had been run over by a train.

But now I know. And I figured it out myself.
I didn't really know Eleanor. And I had never met her kid. So
there was no reason for me to feel joy or sorrow or
anything that might happen to them. Here is what went through
my mind that summer day.

Someone got killed.

Wow! I'm glad I didn't get killed.

I'm glad Vermont or my parents didn't get killed.

I'm glad all my friends are okay.

He must have been a pretty dumb kid, playing on the train tracks.

I would never get run over by a train like that.

I'm glad I'm okay.

And at the end, I smiled with relief. Whatever killed him
was not going to get me. I didn't even know him. It was all
to be okay, at least for me. Today my feelings would be exactly the
same in that situation. The only difference is, now I have
control of my facial expressions.

The fact is, from an evolutionary standpoint, people have
inbred tendency to care about and protect themselves and their
immediate family. We do not naturally care about people we
know. If ten people get killed in a bus crash in Brazil, I don't
feel sad. But then I understand intellectually that it's sad, but I can't
puzzles and troubles me because I don't seem to be reacting to
same way. For much of my life, being different
bad, even though I never thought I was.
That's terrible.

My mother sent me to therapists, all of whom focused on the wrong things. Mostly, they made me feel worse than I already did, dwelling on my so-called evil and sociopathic thoughts. They were all full of it. They didn't make me better. They just made me feel worse. None of them figured out why I grinned when I heard Eleanor's kid had been run over by a train.

But now I know. And I figured it out myself. I didn't really know Eleanor. And I had never met her kid. So there was no reason for me to feel joy or sorrow on account of anything that might happen to them. Here is what went through my mind that summer day:

Someone got killed.

Wow! I'm glad I didn't get killed.

I'm glad Varmint or my parents didn't get killed.

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And at the end, I smiled with relief. Whatever killed that kid was not going to get me. I didn't even know him. It was all going to be okay, at least for me. Today my feelings would be exactly the same in that situation. The only difference is, now I have better control of my facial expressions.

The fact is, from an evolutionary standpoint, people have an inbred tendency to care about and protect themselves and their immediate family. We do not naturally care about people we don't know. If ten people get killed in a bus crash in Brazil, I don't feel anything at all. I understand intellectually that it's sad, but I don't feel sad. But then I see people making a big deal over it and it puzzles and troubles me because I don't seem to be reacting the same way. For much of my life, being different equated to being bad, even though I never thought of myself that way.

"That's terrible! Oh, I just feel awful!" Some people will cry and carry on, and I wonder . . . *Do they really feel that, or is it just*

play for attention? It's a minute, all over the world, our little hearts won't

As I've gotten older, I do it well enough, but maybe longer. But I have a strong emotional reaction that people expect. In a way, as a sociopathic killer I was born

Ten years ago, I was in a car accident

"That's terrible,"

I immediately felt panic was frantic. Would he be doing and I was

As it happened, we both recovered from the accident, but I did not leave me until I went to the doctors, and I was right.

I contrast that incident with just crashed in Uzbekistan

"That's terrible,"

To an observer, my reaction. But to me there is a natural tendency to care—about ourselves and several kinds of empathy for family and close friends. If one of them, I feel terrible. I get jumpy. That's a cramp. I get jumpy. That's a cramp.

When something happens, I have a reaction but I still react. I involve danger, my instincts tell me things?

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The fact is, from an evolutionary standpoint, people have an inbred tendency to care about and protect themselves and their immediate family. We do not naturally care about people we don't know. If ten people get killed in a bus crash in Brazil, I don't feel anything at all. I understand intellectually that it's sad, but I don't feel sad. But then I see people making a big deal over it and it puzzles and troubles me because I don't seem to be reacting the same way. For much of my life, being different equated to being bad, even though I never thought of myself that way.

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