

Helpless Laughter

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Why is someone else tickling you more ticklish than tickling yourself?

Question:

Why is it that if you tickle yourself it doesn't tickle, but if someone else tickles you, you cannot stand it?

Answer:

If someone was tickling you and you managed to remain relaxed, it would not affect you at all. Of course, it would be difficult to stay relaxed, because tickling causes tension for most of us, such as feelings of unease due to physical contact, the lack of control and the fear of whether it will tickle or hurt. However, some people are not ticklish--those who for some reason do not get tense.

When you try to tickle yourself you are in complete control of the situation. There is no need to get tense and, therefore, no reaction. You will notice the same effect if you close your eyes, breathe calmly and manage to relax the next time someone tickles you.

The laughter is the result of the mild state of panic you are in. This may be inconsistent with "survival of the fittest" theories, because panic makes you more vulnerable. But as in so many cases, nature is not necessarily logical.

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