**Limbic resonance** is the capacity for sharing deep emotional states arising from the [limbic system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_system%22%20%5Co%20%22Limbic%20system) of the [brain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brain%22%20%5Co%20%22Brain).[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-1) These states include the [dopamine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dopamine%22%20%5Co%20%22Dopamine) circuit promoted feelings of [empathic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empathy%22%20%5Co%20%22Empathy) harmony, and the [norepinephrine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norepinephrine%22%20%5Co%20%22Norepinephrine) circuit originated emotional states of fear, anxiety and anger.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-2) The concept was first advanced in the book [*A General Theory of Love*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_General_Theory_of_Love) (2000). It refers to the capacity for [empathy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empathy) and non-verbal connection that is present in animals, and that forms the basis of our social connections as well as the foundation for various modes of therapy and healing. According to the authors (Thomas Lewis, M.D, Fari Amini, M.D. and Richard Lannon, M.D.), professors of psychiatry at [UCSF](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UCSF), our [nervous systems](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nervous_system) are not self-contained, but rather demonstrably attuned to those around us with whom we share a close connection. "Within the effulgence of their new brain, mammals developed a capacity we call 'limbic resonance' — a symphony of mutual exchange and internal adaptation whereby two mammals become attuned to each other's inner states."[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-3)

This notion of limbic resonance builds on previous formulations and similar ideas. For example, the authors retell at length the notorious experiments of [Harry Harlow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Harlow) establishing the importance of physical contact and affection in social and cognitive development of rhesus monkeys.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-4) They also make extensive use of subsequent research by Tiffany Field in mother/infant contact,[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-5)[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-6) [Paul D. MacLean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_D._MacLean) on the [triune brain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triune_brain) (reptilian, limbic, and neocortex),[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-7) and the work of G.W. Kraemer.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-8)

**Subsequent use of the term**

Since the first publication of [*A General Theory of Love*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_General_Theory_of_Love) in 2000, the term limbic resonance has gained popularity with subsequent writers and researchers.[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-9) The term brings a higher degree of specificity to the ongoing discourse in psychological literature concerning the importance of empathy and relatedness. In "A handbook of Psychology" (2003) a clear path is traced from Winnicott 1965 identifying the concept of mother and child as a relational organism or dyad[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-10)[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-weiner2003-11):92[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-12) and goes on to examine the interrelation of social and emotional responding with neurological development and the role of the limbic system in regulating response to stress.[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-weiner2003-11):117

Limbic resonance is also referred to as "empathic resonance", as in the book *Empathy in Mental Illness* (2007), which establishes the centrality of empathy or lack thereof in a range of individual and social pathologies. The authors Farrow and Woodruff cite the work of Maclean, 1985, as establishing that "Empathy is perhaps the heart of mammalian development, limbic regulation and social organization",[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-farrow2007-13):50 as well as research by Carr et al., 2003, who used [fMRI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FMRI) to map brain activity during the observation and imitation of emotional facial expressions, concluding that "we understand the feelings of others via a mechanism of action representation that shapes emotional content and that our empathic resonance is grounded in the experience of our bodies in action and the emotions associated with specific bodily movements".[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-farrow2007-13):179 Other studies cited examine the link between mirror neurons (activated during such mimicking activity) and the limbic system, such as Chartrand & Bargh, 1999: "Mirror neurone areas seem to monitor this interdependence, this intimacy, this sense of collective agency that comes out of social interactions and that is tightly linked to the ability to form empathic resonance."[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-farrow2007-13):317

Limbic resonance and limbic regulation are also referred to as "mood contagion" or "[emotional contagion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional_contagion)" as in the work of Sigal Barsade and colleagues at the Yale School of Management.[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance#cite_note-Barsade2002-14) In *The Wise Heart*, Buddhist teacher [Jack Kornfield](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Kornfield) echoes the musical metaphor of the original definition of "limbic resonance" offered by authors Lewis, Amini and Lannon of [*A General Theory of Love*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_General_Theory_of_Love), and correlates these findings of Western psychology with the tenets of Buddhism: "Each time we meet another human being and honor their dignity, we help those around us. Their hearts resonate with ours in exactly the same way the strings of an unplucked violin vibrate with the sounds of a violin played nearby. Western psychology has documented this phenomenon of 'mood contagion' or limbic resonance. If a person filled with panic or hatred walks into a room, we feel it immediately, and unless we are very mindful, that person's negative state will begin to overtake our own. When a joyfully expressive person walks into a room, we can feel that state as well."[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbic_resonance%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-15)

In March 2010, citing *[A General Theory of Love](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_General_Theory_of_Love%22%20%5Co%20%22A%20General%20Theory%20of%20Love)*, Kevin Slavin referred to limbic resonance in considering the dynamics of [Social television](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_television%22%20%5Co%20%22Social%20television). Broadly, Slavin suggests that the [laugh track](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laugh_track%22%20%5Co%20%22Laugh%20track) evolved to provide the audience—alone at home—with a sense that others around them were laughing, and that limbic resonance explains the need for that laughing audience.

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