

Women Aren't Especially Empathetic

I had a student years ago that was active, playful, distracting, had a short attention span, liked to roughhouse, was an independent thinker and lacked reverence for authority. However, he was incredibly non-malicious and friendly.

The teachers and parents (mostly women) in the organization strongly disliked this child. They didn't like his lack of reverence, his demeanor that didn't desire their approval, his male/boy-like qualities (independence, roughhousing, short attention span). This kid was picked on by other students, and was generally disliked within the organization, and it irritated the crap out of me ... because he was a really good guy who deserved respect that no one desired to offer him.

Anyway, I use this as a base to remark on a social phenomenon that is commonly accepted in our society, but is incredibly inaccurate.

Empathy, in general, is not a feminine trait. I don't say this to defame women. I love women. I have two daughters and a wife that I absolutely adore. However, even for them, empathy, in general, isn't a strong point.

When I have strong feelings throughout my life, women didn't commonly empathize with me. When I felt anger, frustration, indignation, assertive, ambitious, accomplished, success, and many other feelings ... women offered me little visibility. I use myself as an example, but anyone who generally portray these types of emotions get very little empathy/visibility from women.

The point I am trying to make is that women aren't good with empathy ... they are good with something slightly closer to pity. If I were to cry, feel sad, get depressed, show vulnerability, be sensitive, portray myself as a victim, and many other emotions of this type women would feel a deep desire to help me, hug me, comfort me, and empathize with me.

As I have gotten older I realized that I used to communicate very poorly with women. I communicated my ideas, my passion, my anger, and frustrations ... but this provided more distance. Now I am older and I have learned to communicate in more subtle ways. While I don't elicit the pity of the women in my life, I try to communicate emotions and processes more than anger and frustration.

This phenomenon is actually a very odd and difficult line to balance for men. Women are attracted to qualities that they have no empathy for. However, this is a little besides the point.

The student I had years ago was picked on, and generally disliked by an organization for

children lead predominantly by women who prided themselves on being empathetic and caring of children. However, this child was treated so horribly because he didn't portray himself as an object to be pitied. He didn't want to be looked at as a victim. He didn't want to cry. He didn't want to ask for help. He wanted to be admired, treated with respect, and for people to respect his independence. However, the "empathetic" women leading the organization has absolutely no desire to offer him this.

I think it is bad for people to believe that women just are naturally more empathetic. When we attribute feminine emotional judgments as the standard for what we ought to concern ourselves with, we tend to set values highly problematically. We are subtly saying that success, confidence, ambition, assertiveness, independence, stoicism, and many other traits aren't worthy of our respect, thoughts, regard, and empathy. I don't think this means we should assume male emotional dispositions are superior in any way. Men have their own skewed tendencies and narratives for processing reality.

Women are prone to pity. Sometimes it is like a drug for them, people often use it as a tool to manipulate them, and it also probably makes them much more caring mothers and more apt to do a good job in an evolutionary sense. There isn't anything wrong with this. My only contention is when people mix up the tendency to pity with a generalized view that women are more empathetic in general.