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Are Gender Differences in Empathy Due to Differences in Emotional Reactivity?

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Author(s)

Linda Rueckert, Brandon Branch, Tiffany Doan

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether gender differences in empathy reflect differences in self-rated emotion, and whether they are influenced by the nature of the target of the empathy (friend or enemy). 24 men and 36 women were asked to rate how much happiness, sadness, and anger they would feel if each of ten scenarios happened to themselves, and how they would feel if it happened to a friend or enemy. Overall, women rated themselves as feeling more happiness and sadness than men, whether the event happened to themselves, or to a friend or enemy. This suggests gender differences in self-reported empathy may be due to differences in general emotional responsiveness. An empathy score was computed by subtracting, for each scenario, the rating for the other person from the rating for self. Women showed a greater difference between friend and enemy than men.

KEYWORDS

Empathy, Sex Differences, Emotion

Cite this paper

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