

Closing the Empathy Gap: Reimagining Masculinity in the Age of Healing

"Be strong."

"Man up."

"Boys don't cry."

These three words, passed from generation to generation like a legacy, have unintentionally built a silent wall around men—a wall that separates pain from expression, vulnerability from connection, and ultimately, men from healing. In a world where mental health struggles are growing louder, men remain dangerously silent. The empathy gap isn't just a social issue—it's a mental health emergency.

The Culture of Emotional Starvation

From boyhood, most men are taught that strength is measured by emotional restraint. Tears are mocked. Fear is belittled. Sensitivity is treated as a flaw. This rigid conditioning leads to emotional starvation—a condition where men are never taught how to express, cope, or process pain.

As a result, many suffer quietly behind smiles, humor, or anger. Depression in men often goes undiagnosed, masked by addiction, violence, or isolation. Suicide rates remain higher among men globally, not because men are weaker, but because society has made it nearly impossible for them to be seen in their pain.

What Is the Empathy Gap?

The empathy gap refers to the lack of emotional understanding and support extended toward men struggling mentally or emotionally. It is not just about being kind—it's about truly listening without judgment, believing without skepticism, and offering support without shame.

This gap exists everywhere—from the playground to the workplace, from families to media portrayals. When a woman expresses sadness, she's often comforted. When a man does the same, he's often met with discomfort, silence, or sarcasm. That double standard feeds the dangerous myth that men must be emotionally invincible.

Redefining Strength: From Silence to Expression

True strength isn't about how much pain you can hide—it's about how much truth you can carry. The world needs to redefine masculinity, not as a rejection of emotion, but as the courage to feel and be felt.

Young boys should be taught that it's okay to cry. Teenagers should be encouraged to talk about anxiety without shame. Grown men should be reminded that needing help doesn't make them weak—it makes them human.

Listening Is Revolutionary

Sometimes, the most powerful act is to simply listen. When a man shares that he's not okay, don't rush to fix it or brush it off. Sit with him in his truth. Let silence be sacred. Let his emotions exist without judgment.

Empathy does not require solutions-it requires presence. We don't need to rescue men from their feelings. We just need to stop pushing them further into emotional exile.

The Role of Storytelling in Healing

As journalists and storytellers, we hold a unique power: to shape narratives, challenge stereotypes, and give voice to the unheard. Writing about men's mental health is not just reporting-it's resistance. It's advocacy. It's healing.

Let us normalize images of fathers going to therapy, brothers asking for help, and male friends having heart-to-heart conversations without shame. Let us spotlight role models who lead with empathy, not ego.

Hope Begins With Us

Closing the empathy gap won't happen overnight. But it begins with one changed conversation, one safe space, one act of kindness. We each have the power to shift the narrative-from one of silence to one of solidarity.

When we extend empathy to men-not as a favor, but as a fundamental right-we don't just help them heal; we help entire families, communities, and nations move forward.

In a world telling men to be strong, let's be the ones telling them it's also okay to be soft.

In a world where boys are told to hide their tears, let's build a world where those tears can be seen, held, and honored.

In that world, the empathy gap disappears-and in its place, healing begins.

Author Bio

Vyona A. Onyango is a dedicated Communication and Media student with a passion for storytelling that sparks change. As a young journalist and content creator, she is committed to amplifying human-interest stories that often go unheard-particularly those surrounding mental health, identity, and social justice. Vyona brings a sharp eye for narrative, a deep sense of empathy, and a professional approach to every piece she writes. With a growing portfolio in journalism, podcasting, and publication, she is driven by the belief that words can heal, challenge, and transform society.