



# Misery and Company: Sympathy in Everyday Life

*Candace Clark*

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## **Misery and Company: Sympathy in Everyday Life** Candace Clark

In a kind of social tour of sympathy, Candace Clark reveals that the emotional experience we call sympathy has a history, logic, and life of its own. Although sympathy may seem to be a natural, reflexive reaction, people are not born knowing when, for whom, and in what circumstances sympathy is appropriate. Rather, they learn elaborate, highly specific rules—different rules for men than for women—that guide when to feel or display sympathy, when to claim it, and how to accept it. Using extensive interviews, cultural artifacts, and "intensive eavesdropping" in public places, such as hospitals and funeral parlors, as well as analyzing charity appeals, blues lyrics, greeting cards, novels, and media reports, Clark shows that we learn culturally prescribed rules that govern our expression of sympathy.

"Clark's . . . research methods [are] inventive and her glimpses of U.S. life revealing. . . . And you have to love a social scientist so respectful of Miss Manners."—Clifford Orwin, *Toronto Globe and Mail*

"Clark offers a thought-provoking and quite interesting etiquette of sympathy according to which we ought to act in order to preserve the sympathy credits we can call on in time of need."—*Virginia Quarterly Review*

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