

Cultural Daily

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Henry Vinson Looks at the Different Ways Men and Women Grieve the Loss of a Loved One

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Losing a loved one is traumatic for both men and women. However, it is also true that, generally speaking and largely due to cultural and social conditioning, men and women experience and express grief differently. Understanding and appreciating these differences can go a long way towards helping both the bereaved and the members of their support system — typically comprised of family members, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and those in their social and spiritual groups — journey forward through the grieving process in as healthy and complete a manner as possible.

According to experienced funeral director and [licensed embalmer Henry Vinson](#), the [three key areas](#) in which men and women generally differ when grieving the loss of a loved one are: seeking isolation versus seeking connection, self-healing versus seeking help from others, and a desire to move forward versus a desire to work through grief.

Seeking Isolation versus Seeking Connection

After the loss of a loved one, men tend to seek isolation — psychologically, and, if necessary, physically — in order to create a safe space within which they can experience (to some degree) a torrent of emotions that may be comprised of regret, anger, shame, guilt, and despair, and other powerful, painful and complex feelings. Alternatively, women are generally less inclined to seek isolation and are more apt to connect with others, such as family members, friends, and so on.

Henry Vinson notes that because of this social and cultural conditioning which goes back to early childhood and is repeatedly reinforced throughout adulthood in a myriad of direct and indirect ways, men often take longer to achieve closure after the loss of a loved one. They may authentically believe they have accepted the loss of a loved one, when in fact they still have significant work to do.

Self-Healing versus Turning Outward

Men are typically less willing to seek help and healing from external sources such as a therapist, doctor, religious official, etc. Again, this is rooted in flawed conditioning that equates independence with strength and interdependence (which is incorrectly perceived as co-dependence) as weakness. Women; however, are much more likely to either actively seek help from external individuals or sources or willingly accept help when it is offered or provided.

Henry Vinson comments that with these general gender differences in mind, it is also important to note that the specific details of a grieving situation play a substantial role in how grieving individuals will feel and behave. For example, a mother who has suddenly lost a child may be absolutely unwilling to accept help from anyone; at least in the immediate aftermath of such an enormous and incomprehensibly catastrophic tragedy.

Henry Vinson on the Desire to Move Forward versus Desire to Work Through Grief

Yet again due to conditioning and not rooted in anything physiological, men tend to approach grief as something that should be (or must be) moved forward through as quickly as possible. Women, on the other hand, are more inclined try to work slowly through their grief by talking about their feelings, their pain, and other difficult details.

Henry Vinson says that men generally want to move past grief, while women generally want to work through it. This can lead to tremendous tension and friction between couples, family members, and friends of different genders who misunderstand the others' motives. Men see women as mired in their grief, when in truth the latter is often doing exactly what experts advise, though perhaps not in the most effective manner. Women see men as uncaring and caustic, when in truth the latter are suffering deeply and trying to do what seems appropriate, although perhaps without the resources and support they need to fully understand and appreciate that there is no way to short-circuit or circumvent the grieving journey.

Photo:  **Marco Chilese**

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