

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

Observing Grief

Styles of Grieving

There are so many different grief responses and no two people will have the exact same feelings and experiences after a death, not even those from the same family, region, religion, or culture.

Kenneth Doka, and Terry Martin in their book [Grieving Beyond Gender](#) outline different grieving styles which they associate with being characteristically “masculine” or “feminine”, although these styles exist on a continuum and that gender is merely a contributing factor.

In general, our culture has come to expect emotional grieving which is characteristically more female. It is easy to put things like tears and sadness into the context of grief and when we see them we say, “Ah yes, this person is grieving appropriately”. Doka and Martin associate this type of grieving with the **intuitive** grieving style.

Intuitive grief is experienced mainly in terms of feelings and emotions – “I felt sad” or “I felt angry” – and the grief response is usually focused on exploring and expressing these emotions – “I cried all night” or “I got so mad I couldn’t think.”

What we know is that not everyone likes to get intimate with their feelings. Although they experience the same emotions, they might feel and express them differently. Doka and Martin associate this type of grieving with the **instrumental** grieving style.

Instrumental grief is experienced in more physical and cognitive ways – “I couldn’t stop thinking about what happened” or “I felt like I couldn’t breathe.” The **instrumental** grief response is expressed in physical, cognitive or behavioural ways and looks more like ‘doing’ or ‘taking action’.

Although **instrumental** grievers might not see a direct correlation between their feelings and their response, if asked what they “did” in response to their loss as opposed to what they “felt,” they might say things like they spoke about the person a lot, created a lasting memorial, immediately found ways to further their loved one’s legacy, or they got involved in charity or activism in their loved one’s memory.

This type of grief expression can be a bit more difficult for outsiders to discern so others might worry the person isn’t dealing with their emotions, when in reality they are just dealing with them differently. **Doka and Martin are in no way saying this is how men grieve and this is how women grieve.** Remember that continuum we mentioned? Well, these theorists say that most of us fall somewhere along the continuum between intuitive and instrumental grief and have what they call a blended experience. People who fall on this continuum borrow living skills from both ends of the spectrum.

Now, when it comes to gender there are a lot of societal, cultural, and personal expectations telling us how we should feel and react; men should be strong and stoic and women should be emotional and sensitive. These assumptions are really unhelpful because a lot of the time they don’t fit, yet we might feel ashamed, guilty, or weak for not feeling or acting our part.

According to Martin and Doka, **dissonant grief** emerges when the way someone’s grief is naturally experienced and expressed clashes with what they think is expected and acceptable. Confusion, shame and repression can emerge when someone who is typically “strong” or unemotional becomes overwhelmed by emotion or someone who expects to be flooded with feelings finds that they aren’t.

It is important as people who are grieving or as friends, family and support workers, to be open to a range of grief responses regardless of our expectations.

*“Death does not end our story.
Death does not end our relationships”*



Intuitive Grief:

- Grief is experienced in waves of emotion
- Grief expression mirrors inner feelings and emotions
- More feeling than thinking
- Focused on exploring and expressing feelings and processing emotions
- More “feminine” way of grieving



Instrumental Grief:

- Grief is experienced in more physical or cognitive ways
- Grief is expressed in more physical, cognitive or behavioral ways
- More thinking than feeling
- Focused on doing and actively responding to grief
- More “masculine” way of grieving

Blended Grievers:

- This is a continuum

