

MEN AND GRIEF

“We are beginning to understand gender differences relating to the way men and women communicate. ... These basic differences lead to dramatically different strengths and paths in processing emotions and, therefore, in the way men and women grieve. Both men and women are affected by our cultural avoidance of death and grief, but this avoidance has a different effect on the two sexes. A woman generally has an easier time in dealing with this prohibition in that she probably has a system of support in place in which intimacy is the keyword. This network of friends or family will often encourage the sharing of grief as a means to connect and therefore become more intimate. A man many times has no such system. He highly values independence and autonomy and sharing grief could be a threat to that. By revealing his grief to another man, he would be putting himself one or more rungs down on the hierarchy. The hierarchy values action and what can be done about things, not emotional connection. It is interested in product, efficiency, action and outcome.

For a man to share his grief, he needs to know that he is respected... This can be easily observed in groups of men who are healing their grief. The work of talking about their grief is usually put off until the men know that they have the respect of the other men. The men tend to naturally avoid talking about their grief for another reason. They see their grief as a burden and don't want to lay that on anybody. In the {male} hierarchical arrangement where product and output are of importance, grief is seen as an impediment to product and output and is therefore not something men want to “share” with others. This can be contrasted with the women's more natural fit, with grief being connected with her leaning towards increasing intimacy. Men see grief as being something that is a problem and a burden, and within a {male} hierarchy you don't place a burden on someone who has no responsibility for it. To express this to another man or to a woman would be, firstly, an admission that he was unable to handle his problems by himself (a sign of lack of independence) and secondly, a dumping of a negative pile of stuff onto someone else who had no responsibility for it...”

Excerpted from Tom Golden's booklet, *Gender and Cultural Differences in Grief*