



Review of Kenneth J. Doka, Terry L. Martin,
*Grieving Beyond Gender: Understanding the
Ways Men and Women Mourn*, rev. ed.
(New York: Routledge, 2010) 258 pp.

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The title of their previous book *Men Don't Cry...Women Do* (2000) aptly circumscribes the authors' concern: how to explain and validate male patterns of grief that fail to conform to therapeutic expectations of successful "ventilation" of emotions that accompany experiences of loss. Terry Martin, professor of psychology at Hood College, and Kenneth Doka, professor of gerontology, are well respected authorities in the field of thanatology and draw on many years of research and scholarship. They call for greater openness among counseling and bereavement professionals and more acceptance of the diversity of coping strategies and "dissonant" grief patterns among bereaved people. Martin and Doka criticize dominant counseling paradigms for privileging the expression of emotion in so far as that marginalizes "'masculine' patterns of grief...[which] are different, but no less effective than, (sic) more 'conventional' or 'feminine' was of dealing with loss" (p. 7). Men, they argue, are not "ineffectual grievers" but do it differently and just as successfully. The book then aims to describe and rehabilitate "masculine" coping strategies. Early on, Doka and Martin discard explicitly gendered nomenclature and introduce the terminology of "intuitive" and "instrumental patterns" of grief, which they consider as "typical" of and correlated with gender, but not determined by it. "Instrumental" grievers work through grief in a more cognitive manner and experience and express less emotion (except anger, p. 72); "Intuitive" grievers "go with" their feelings and require social support where their emotional needs can be expressed openly and freely. "Instrumental" grievers pour themselves into activities and attempt to "master their environment" (pp. 70-75). They think through and solve problems (p. 75) that arise from their changed life circumstance. "Intuitive grievers" reach out for help and benefit from counseling where they can "ventilate" their feelings. Neither strategy, the authors assert, is superior. They are just different and each deserves validation and support.

Beyond the book's concrete proposals to correct contemporary grief counseling practices, I want to examine some of the underlying assumptions about gender that I find troubling. My first concern involves certain slippages between descriptive and prescriptive gender definitions. Without a doubt, contemporary gender role socialization profoundly affects and shapes people's experiences and expression of emotions, including grief. But should such gendered role expectations be validated and considered "good" and "right"? The authors stress throughout the book that "gender influences patterns of grief, but gender does not determine patterns of grief" (pp. 4, 10, 141, 202), but they do not truly move "beyond gender," as the title promises. Instead of envisioning grieving beyond gender in a world of expanded gender fluidity, the authors reject what they call "androgynous

perspectives” (pp. 184-186). “Androgyny,” defined as “the perspective that one can learn much from both the feminine ability to recognize and to express feelings and the masculine ability to persevere in the midst of crisis” (p. 184), strikes Doka and Martin as “doubly incarcerating” because it threatens to force an “uncomfortable and unfamiliar approach” upon an individual in the middle of a crisis and vulnerability (p. 185). The authors’ use of the dated concept of “androgyny,” which derives from C. G. Jung’s theories developed in the 1920s, points towards their pre- or post-feminist perspectives on gender. They remain beholden to notions of masculinity (more recently advanced by Robert Bly [p. 135]) that are somewhat tempered by Jung’s idea that men should integrate their feminine sides (*anima*) while women may access their masculine *animus*. The concept of “androgyny” reaffirms the gendered division of the world. It is a world of weak emotional women and strong heroic men, a fiction that conveniently overlooks that women have persevered through each and every crisis weathered by men. While no one calls for the imposition of feminist reeducation campaigns in the midst of a life crisis, the opposite conclusion, namely to implement implicitly gendered counseling strategies seems equally problematic.

My second concern involves the authors’ contention that these patterns are “different but equal.” The specter of “separate but equal” raises alarm bells because masculinity and femininity are never just different but always mutually interdependent. Women’s emotional labor of care compensates for men’s lack of relational investment. The “instrumental” approach of “mastery” over “oneself,” the “environment” and “one’s feelings” (p. 85) is usually upheld by the invisible work of an “intuitive” partner. Men’s alleged “cognitive” approach to the world is sustained by emotional “care” performed by women. The authors acknowledge that “instrumental griever tend to return to their jobs and their previous levels of performance sooner than intuitive griever” (p. 117) but they fail to see the connection. It may just be that “instrumental griever” benefit from the emotional labor of “intuitive griever.” There is a reason why widowers remarry so much quicker than widows. Men know intuitively that the “thinking function” of mastery depends upon the “feeling function” of embodied care, usually though not always, delivered by women. “Masculinity” and “femininity” are not just different, they depend on and reinforce each other—usually in a manner that upholds the supremacy of men. Apart from the context of therapy, our (capitalist) society prizes and remunerates “mastery,” “thinking,” problem solving and control of emotion, while those who wallow in emotion and ventilate their feelings are considered weak, inefficient and useless. The costs and benefits of these two grieving styles are not distributed equally.

For readers of this journal it should be noted that spirituality receives only cursory mention as one of four “reactions” to the loss of a loved one (physical, affective, cognitive and spiritual). A rather functionalist approach to spirituality defined as the search for “meaning and purpose of life” (p. 23) is not particularly illuminating to scholars in the discipline of religious studies or theology.

Doka and Martin challenge grief support agencies and individuals to broaden their assistance strategies for male clients in grief counseling. They show persuasively that gender expectations shape the experience and expression of grief. Their conclusion that grief support should be tailored to the particular needs and

strengths of individuals' coping strategies is well taken. But their simplistic gender analysis makes this book less than helpful for scholars engaged in feminist and gender studies.

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