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For Widows, Everyone Has An Opinion When It Comes To Dating Again

Widows like Amanda Kloots have enough on their plate emotionally without having to deal with people's judgment, too.

By Brittany Wong

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It's been an unimaginably hard year for [Amanda Kloots](#), the co-host of "The Talk" who lost her husband, Broadway star [Nick Cordero](#), from [complications from COVID-19 just over a](#)



the internet, *everyone* has an opinion on it.

“Dating already wow that was fast,” [one person wrote](#) in a comment on one of Kloots’ Instagram posts, according to a screenshot the TV host shared.

Kloots, 39, [put the person in their place](#), but it brought to light an ugly secret about widowhood: When you’re a woman who’s lost a spouse and dating again, people feel at liberty to weigh in on your choice. Usually, that opinion is chock full of judgment.

But when you’re a *man* who’s lost a spouse, people are much more prone to sympathize and support your choices. Heck, they might even kindly offer to set you up with someone nice they know.

Days after Kloots talked about the online criticism, Sheryl Sandberg, the [Facebook](#) chief operating officer who lost her [husband Dave Goldberg unexpectedly in 2015](#), spoke about her own experiences dating again and just how sharp the contrast in treatment is between widows and widowers.

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“It won’t shock you to know that we judge women more harshly for dating after death than we judge men,” Sandberg said on the [“People Every Day” podcast](#) last week.



get back out there, reminding her that if you [were] a man, you would start dating now.” (Happily, Sandberg seems to have eventually taken the advice; the tech exec confirmed her engagement to [boyfriend Tom Bernthal](#) in December 2020.)



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Amanda Kloots lost her husband, Broadway star Nick Cordero, from complications of COVID-19 one year ago. Now, Kloots — pictured to the left with Cordero and their son, Elvis, and to the right on "The Talk" — is facing online criticism for dating again.

Experts say there really is no proper timetable for dating after the loss of a partner; the readiness factor varies significantly from person to person. For every person who's eager to date again, there's another who feels entirely squeamish about reentering the world of "swipe left" or "swipe right."

But the antiquated idea that a bereaved woman needs to observe a formal mourning period has fierce sticking power, said [Diane Brennan](#), a licensed mental health counselor in New York City who facilitates group therapy sessions for widows ages 25 to 40.

"I try to prepare my clients for the possibility of others making comments," she told HuffPost. "We work on how to best respond when others pass judgment, whether they think you



else:

Still, it's hard to push back on the judgment that's placed on them.

"Honestly, it causes more pain for the griever," Brennan said. "I wish that people understood that when they offer their commentary."

All too often, people are responding to what they think they might do in a similar situation, said Allen Klein, author of ["Embracing Life After Loss: A Gentle Guide for Growing Through Grief."](#)

"Someone might say, 'Oh, I'd never date so soon after my spouse died,'" he said. "In reality, no one really knows how they would react until the situation actually happens."

The fact that Kloots is dating after Cordero's passing is "no disrespect to him," Klein said. "It's just a way she is dealing with the loss. [As she said on her talk show](#), getting out and meeting so many 'wonderful people' has been helpful."

Someone's readiness to love again may in some ways be a testament to the quality of their marriage, wrote Kerry Phillips, a widow at 32, in her online blog called Young, Widowed and Dating.

"We know the beauty that radiates from a couple in love and what companionship and commitment looks and feels like," [she wrote](#).

Modern-day widows come up against old expectations.

Kate O'Neill, a strategy consultant and the author of 2015 memoir ["Surviving Death,"](#) lost her husband of nine years,



those close to O'Neill were supportive of her choice to date again, some acquaintances felt differently.

“People who were more casual friends had a harder time, especially if they'd known me and Karsten socially as a couple,” O'Neill told HuffPost.

But O'Neill desperately wanted to meet new men and women, if only just to laugh again. (“Must be funny” was pretty much a prerequisite for a first date candidate.)

“To me, nothing about choosing to date was in any way a negative reflection on how much Karsten meant to me or how profoundly I had been affected by his loss,” she said.

“My intense grief went on in parallel with my instinct to keep myself intact and afloat by trying to have moments of joy and meaning in my life.”

“Some of the attitudes towards widowed women dating feel archaic, as if by definition a woman who has lost her husband has also lost her own role and standing in society.”

- KATE O'NEILL, A A STRATEGY CONSULTANT AND THE AUTHOR OF 2015 MEMOIR “SURVIVING DEATH”

She's certain those same judgy acquaintances in her life would have felt differently about her decision had she been a guy.

“Some of the attitudes towards widowed women dating feel archaic, as if by definition a woman who has lost her husband has also lost her own role and standing in society,” she said.



old 1970s-era book a friend had found in a secondhand store about widowed women, written by a widow.

“As I read it, I remember feeling surprised by the subtle implications of embarrassment, fear and uselessness that even the author herself seemed to express, apparently without overtly meaning to,” O’Neill said.

As a relatively young widow and a busy entrepreneur, O’Neill was in a different boat socially, financially and psychologically.

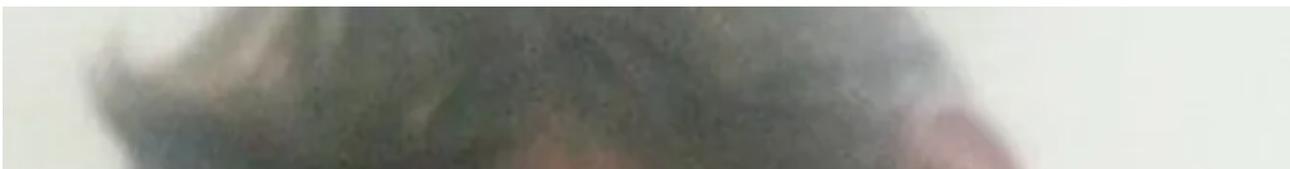
“Losing your loved one *and* your social ties *and* your economic security *and* the close companionship you hoped you’d have for the rest of your life is something else entirely,” O’Neill said.

That’s “heartbreaks on top of heartbreak,” she said, but not necessarily reflective of the experiences of many modern-day widows.

The expectation to go slow also discounts an important emotional factor: Many widows are grappling with having been a caretaker to their spouse for years and years before the loss. Some have grieved prematurely and are eager for companionship.

That was the case for Connie, a former flight attendant from Illinois, who joined [Match.com](https://www.match.com) about six months after her husband of 22 years died of cancer in January 2017.

“Men and women who’ve lost a spouse are often desperately lonely and craving affection,” she said. “Some in my family judged me, but you have to keep in mind, while a spouse is ill there is no intimacy.”





CONNIE

Connie, a former flight attendant from Illinois, missed intimacy when she lost her husband of 22 years in January 2017.

The “widow dating again” experience is much different than the “widower dating again” experience.



wife of seven years, Liz, to breast cancer in 2013. He was in no rush to date again; on top of mourning Liz, he was busy caring for the couple's infant son.

But had he been eager to get back out there, his decision probably would've been celebrated. His late wife's friends have set him up with all but one of the women he's dated seriously since her death.

"I think men and women are perceived very differently here," he told HuffPost. "People generally think 'Oh, he should be out dating, he's young and his son needs a wife.'"





PHILLIP TATE

Phillip Tate's late wife, Liz, told him several times before she was sick that if anything ever happened to her she wanted him to "wait a respectable period of time," then date again. "She said she didn't think I'd do well alone," he said. In the end, he was in no rush to date.

[James LaVeck](#), the author of the memoir "[Life After Losses](#)," agrees with that. LaVeck has been widowed twice. His first husband, Bob, died in August 1995 from AIDS-related non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The couple had been together for seven years. LaVeck was only 27 at the time.

The writer's second husband, also named Bob, died in January 2014 from an accidental opioid overdose. The pair had been together 15 years and had adopted two children, who were 10 and 11 years old at the time of their dad's death.

It quickly dawned on LaVeck that men were expected to "get over it" faster — especially gay men.

"From my perspective as a gay man, many people don't find same-sex marriages to be equally emotional as opposite-sex," he told HuffPost. "Men aren't supposed to express emotions in our society; women are expected to be overly emotional."

Grief, however, throws all those tropes out the window.

"Grief is chaotic," LaVeck said. "It makes no sense that someone we loved is gone, and how we process that information varies with each person."

After his first husband died, it was a good two years before LaVeck felt he could even fathom seeing someone new. "When I did start dating, it felt like cheating on him," he said. "I never thought it was too soon, nor did anyone else in my circle."



JAMES LAVECK

James LaVeck is a two-time widower. To the left, he's pictured with his first husband, Bob, who died in 1995. To the right, he's pictured with his second husband, also named Bob, and their two children.

He dated maybe a half-dozen men during the following year, he said. On the third anniversary of his late husband's death, he met his second husband.

"The time between meeting and getting engaged was about four months," LaVeck said. "*This* felt too soon to most of my family, but I had been mourning for three years, and it didn't feel that fast to me."

As a two-time widower, LaVeck knows better to equate someone's window of time as a single person to how much they loved their former spouse.

"One of my friends started dating six weeks after his wife died," he said. "I don't believe he loved her any less than I loved my husband, and I believe we all have our own ways of grieving."

Here's what you should say to a widow or widower.



pregnant with her youngest child when her husband of six years, Keith, was diagnosed with adenocarcinoma, an aggressive, non-treatable, incurable cancer. He died in January 2015.

Six months later, McCoy distinctly recalls pulling into the garage and thinking, “Oh, so this is why people remarry so quickly.”

“I didn’t actually start dating then, but I was acutely aware of my desire to be in a partnership and not have to solo-parent any longer than I had to,” she said. “It was probably a year or two, once I felt like I wasn’t barely surviving, that I started dating again.”

At first, she felt a bit wobbly on first dates. But eventually, she realized she had the emotional capacity and confidence to date again.

“I knew it would probably be a while before I felt comfortable enough to be truly ready for a relationship, but I definitely didn’t feel like it was too soon or had been too long,” she said.



BECKY L MCCOY



It helped that she had her late husband's blessing.

“When my husband was sick, he had bugged me to apply for ‘The Bachelor’/‘Bachelorette’ or assemble a steering committee and start dating before he died so I didn’t have to be single,” McCoy said. “I definitely did not have any guilt about dating again.”

She was also lucky that her friends and family were excited to see her get out there again, at her own pace. But talking to other young widows, she knows she's the exception, not the rule.

“I find the ‘widows vs. widowers dating again’ fascinating,” she said. “I tend to think of it as: Some people heal better in a partnership and some people need solitude to heal. Who is to say which version is better?”

What *can* be said in place of “Oh, you’re dating again? That was quick?”

McCoy recommends simply asking a widowed friend what they need in the immediate moment. “You might ask them if they’re even interested in being set up, for instance!” she said.

If you aren’t close enough to them to know if they’re dating or not, that’s enough of a sign that it’s not your place to ask or involve yourself.

“Losing a spouse and opening yourself up to potential loss again is difficult and painful and no amount of good intentions will make it less so,” McCoy said. “Just keep encouraging and affirming and tell them you want goodness for them.”



happiness coming to fruition, McCoy said, and let them find their own way.”

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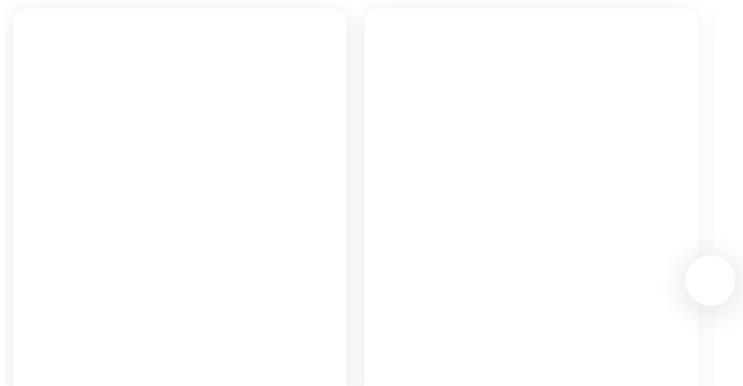
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