



Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief

Pauline G. Boss

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When a loved one dies we mourn our loss. We take comfort in the rituals that mark the passing, and we turn to those around us for support. But what happens when there is no closure, when a family member or a friend who may be still alive is lost to us nonetheless? How, for example, does the mother whose soldier son is missing in action, or the family of an Alzheimer's patient who is suffering from severe dementia, deal with the uncertainty surrounding this kind of loss?

In this sensitive and lucid account, Pauline Boss explains that, all too often, those confronted with such ambiguous loss fluctuate between hope and hopelessness. Suffered too long, these emotions can deaden feeling and make it impossible for people to move on with their lives. Yet the central message of this book is that they can move on. Drawing on her research and clinical experience, Boss suggests strategies that can cushion the pain and help families come to terms with their grief. Her work features the heartening narratives of those who cope with ambiguous loss and manage to leave their sadness behind, including those who have lost family members to divorce, immigration, adoption, chronic mental illness, and brain injury. With its message of hope, this eloquent book offers guidance and understanding to those struggling to regain their lives.

Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief Details

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From Reader Review Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief for online ebook

Kristine Thurston says

An invaluable tool for a wide range of ambiguous and difficult situations. There is another book written for professional, which I believe goes into the topic in greater detail. Nevertheless, a worthwhile read for anyone grappling with a loss in which it's a challenge to find closure or self-forgiveness.

Melynda says

Whew! It's not just me and it **isn't** my fault. I knew I was dealing with something far more complex than the traditional Kubler-Ross model of grief. Boss's work explains with perfect clarity what it is like to live with a family member who may be physically gone but psychologically present or psychologically gone but physically present. I appreciated the discussion on ways to live well with ambiguous loss and the recognition that the loss never goes away and the resulting grief isn't resolved. I **highly** recommend this book to anyone who has suffered an ambiguous loss in their life.

Alicia Eskew says

Quick, easy read, but packed with insight. A KEEPER of a text or reference book! Written for therapy and treatment, this book could be placed directly in the hands of many who are struggling with 'frozen sadness'. A compassionate key book in understanding the effects of the most common type of loss we experience. If you are in the Psych/Counseling/Human Services world: a Must Read!

Edward Ferrari says

Came across this book in my search for work on 'immigration grief,' a topic on which I am doing some reading having recently immigrated. Although this short book is not specifically on immigration per se it does provide a good background and context for it. It's worth reading if you're remotely interested in the subject as the stories about different approaches to 'ambiguous loss' (varying from families of soldiers MIA, those coping with alzheimer's, and family members who are otherwise 'psychologically absent') can apply to most peoples' lives.

Julene says

This is a well written book about 'ambiguous' losses people may not think typically consider: immigrants who left their family behind and may never see them again, people who have disappeared, those MIAs during war or hostages, people with long lingering illnesses like alzheimer's, families with mentally ill relatives. All these produce anxiety that can become severe and lead to post traumatic stress. Because there is

no clear closure it causes confusion and freezes the grieving process. She suggests providers ask questions to find out if there are any such losses. Pauline Boss is a family therapist who works to find ways to reconstruct and cope with such losses through family/group reorganization. She uses examples from cultures that use rituals, or have beliefs and values that help them cope. In particular, she has worked with the Anishinabe women in northern Minnesota.

First step, is to label what the experience is, then to learn there are others experiencing it, hence to overcome the solitude. She says to, 'temper our hunger for mastery' over the situation since it is not possible to master it. It can be helpful to redefine our relationship to the missing person and realize any symptoms we are experiencing are possibly due to the ambiguity. She brings families together to discuss their loss and come up with new solutions collectively, even including the person if they are missing due to illness versus physically missing. This means the family must sometimes take a 'family gamble.' These 'family gambles' are natural transitions within even normal families such as when children grow up and leave home. This is a confusing time for many families. When is someone really gone is not always crystal clear and can cause confusion. She says, "The goal is to be at ease with solutions that are imperfect."

I plan to read more of her work.

Kathleen says

This book, difficult to read only because one tends to read it when in the midst of sorrow and grief, helps delineate the difference between grief and mourning. It is especially helpful to me as a "dementia/ALZ wife/widow," where the man I married has died to me, but he is also present and alive in his illness.

It deals with my current situation, as well as losses without closure such as wartime, sudden death, and other losses, be them large or small.

Pamela H says

Este libro me pareció interesante por el concepto de pérdida ambigua, resulta que en varios ámbitos de mi país (eventos a nivel social y político que han devenido en muertes, desapariciones y con ello una serie de consecuencias a nivel personal, familiar y cultural) es posible trabajar con este material. El libro expone los desarrollos de la autora respecto trabajar con las familias donde el cuerpo de su familiar no ha sido encontrado nunca y los sentimientos, pensamientos, formas de vivir el duelo que esto suscita. Todo esto, desde la perspectiva sistémica. Recomiendo leerlo y utilizarlo en cuestiones sobre psicología.

LemontreeLime says

An excellent insightful overview of the experience of loss without closure. Boss brings stories from settlers who lose their contact with their homelands and families, and from the families of MIA soldiers, as well as those lost to Alzheimer's disease, to examine her subject.

Cherene says

This is a great book about ambiguous loss--when you've lost the person, but they're still there (like with divorce, immigration, a missing child, or Alzheimer's disease). This book helped me understand the conflicting emotions involved, and the many different ways (both adaptive and maladaptive) that people deal with their grief.

Chris says

What a helpful, enlightening book! Boss introduces the concept of ambiguous loss and helps us understand how it's different from clear loss. This concept applies to so many of our losses in life - she concentrates on the loss experienced in chronic illness, but it's easily applicable to many other things. Her writing is beautiful and understandable. LOVED the book. Use it all the time.

Fabio A says

Touching and useful to is all

Boss takes us on a journey on a suffering that cannot be cured but that can find meaning . It doesn't apply just to families of missing persons, grief without a body, but also to workaholic parents , demented loved ones who aren't who they used to be but we still have to find a piece of them in a new frame. Symbolism, flexibility to help families find meaning to then unfreeze themselves are the keys Boss gives us in this provocative and well written book merging clinical interventions with real life situations we all face sooner or later.

bookworm22 says

This is an excellent theoretical book that is written in a clear manner that overviews issues, explicitly and otherwise, that are common to adoption/foster care situations and, in general, address how these processes are very stressful and difficult. I think that every CPS worker and person who is going through CPS involvement should read this book! It helps give words to issues that are very emotional and, well, ambiguous.

Karen says

My family has been searching for my uncle who's been missing in Laos for 48 years. His plane was shot down during the Vietnam War. Although I've read several books about the war itself and the US's secret involvement in Laos, I've never seen anything that focuses on the family's ability to deal with the loss. The crash site has been excavated, but just recently we've learned the results have led to only more ambiguity.

This book came at the right time as I'm struggling to offer what support I can to my family and make sense of these new developments.

Aside from this extreme example, the book offers a helpful framework for more common types of ambiguous loss that we continue to encounter on a regular basis.

Deborah says

Professor Boss underscores the importance of taking notice of and resolving "ambiguous" losses that accumulate over time and can affect our lives. Most people notice the big losses/changes: death, divorce, job loss, but do we notice the quieter losses such as a marriage (loss of singlehood), a new baby (loss of couplehood), graduations, retiring, aging, even seasonal changes? Ambiguous losses are both universal and individualistic. By attending to unresolved loss, we can more fully experience life and learn to be more compassionate with ourselves and others.

Erin says

Repetitive at times, but overall an excellent reminder of the importance of defining loss broadly and practicing accordingly.

- general interpersonal approach
- also emphasizes narrative, systems, and cross-cultural perspectives

I should add: grounded in historical psych theory, so not necessarily a "fresh" perspective, but well researched and accessible to the general population as well as clinicians
