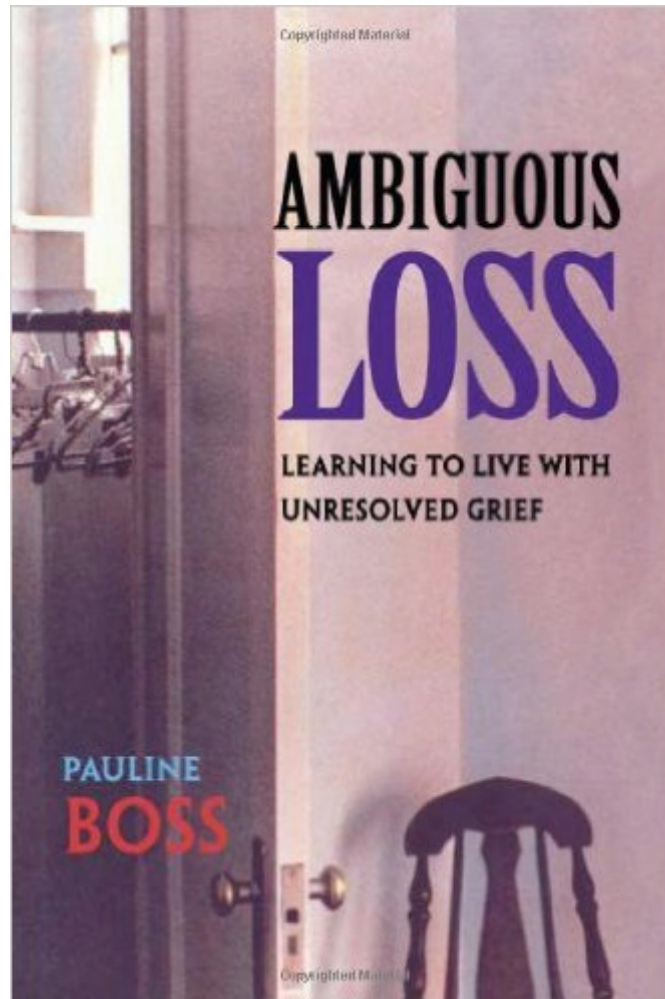


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Ambiguous Loss: Learning To Live With Unresolved Grief



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press; 1 edition (October 2, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674003810

ISBN-13: 978-0674003811

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.5 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (50 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #48,146 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #74 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Death](#) #97 in [Books > Self-Help > Death & Grief > Grief & Bereavement](#) #106 in [Books > Self-Help > Relationships > Love & Loss](#)

Customer Reviews

At one point while I was reading this book, my wife asked me, "How's the book?" I said, "I've had to stop reading and brush away the tears nine times so far." The first several pages of the book constitute one of the finest examples I have ever read of what Aristotle meant by ethos and pathos as powerful elements of rhetoric. Professor Boss masterfully and unpretentiously builds our

confidence in her character and credibility from the first paragraph. Then she quickly grabs our hearts and never lets go. The humility with which the author presents her thesis is so utterly refreshing: no pontificating, no posturing, no attacking or discounting beliefs or experiences different from her own. But what touched and gratified me most of all is the extraordinary grace and sensitivity Ms. Boss has achieved in this work. Into and among the facts and conclusions, the science if you will, she has woven powerful, heart-wrenching stories and personal experiences--all of which are further enhanced by her deft references to beloved works of art, literature, poetry and music. What a rich, vibrant tapestry! Or, in light of the warmth, honesty and and lack of self consciousness in her writing, maybe it would more accurate to compare the book to one of her Grandmother Elsbeth's quilts. As I remember, one quote on the jacket said that this is a "healing" book. That may very well be an understatement. And the application is universal. I'm sure my tears came in part from my recognition of several instances of unresolved ambiguous loss in my own life. I am grateful to Pauline Boss for touching my heart deeply, for creating a new awareness in me and for helping me to begin some of my own healing.

Here's how I would rate this book if I had the flexibility to do so: five stars, if you need to prove to someone in your life that there is such a thing as ambiguous loss; three stars if your family is suffering the psychological loss of a family member through a disease such as Alzheimer's; and two stars if you are trying to name or process any other ambiguous loss, from a parent who disappeared after a divorce to a miscarriage to a friendship that melts away. Be warned: You will not find in these pages much practical advice for dealing with ambiguous loss. Boss's main goal seems to be convincing other therapists and laypeople that ambiguous loss exists. The one concrete step she advocates is family sessions with one or more therapists in attendance for illness-related losses, mainly Alzheimer's. In non-illness related loss, the book is weak. Boss skims by the effects of a father or mother disappearing after a divorce; families with a history of cutting off family members; the fading of once-close friendships; loss experienced after the ending of an illicit relationship; or rejection in professional situations. She acknowledges these are losses but not how to approach them as such. In short, if you as an individual already know you are grieving an ambiguous loss and want specific help in dealing with that, you'll find this book disappointing. You'll do better to purchase books on grief/the grieving process.

Dr. Boss's book landed in my hands quite by accident, at a time when my closest friend moved away. I was devastated, and I was totally unprepared to deal with my emotional and psychological

reactions to the situation simply because I didn't understand the reasons for them. Dr. Boss helped me see my grief as natural and normal, and gave me a footing to rebuild on. The stories of immigrants were most affective in my case; but other stories of ambiguous loss situations also helped me to deal with my ex-husband, and with my father's slow death. I have come to realize also all the little ambiguous losses we live with everyday. They are not death; they are part of life.

I just finished reading this book and I found it quite moving and helpful for those who are dealing with caring for Alzheimers patients. It also explains in detail on ambiguous loss of families of MIAs and those who are immigrants. It also gives some good insights on families who are dealing with family members who are slowly dying. She offers hope for families who are dealing with these issues. While I am appreciative of her recognition that those who are touched by adoption deal with ambiguous loss, she really did not give it the attention that she gave other cases of ambiguous loss. As someone touched by adoption, I found it lacking and therefore I am taking 1 star away for those who come to this book seeking answers to adoption issues. I came away with the feeling that she had limited knowledge of adoption issues. She tended to concentrate on topics close to her heart and related to her research area. I would really like to see a book that deals with Ambiguous Loss in Adoption in more detail. If adoption is not a part of your experience, but you are dealing with those in your life who are physically present, but not psychologically present, or who are psychologically present, but not physically present, this book can be a good first step. The book could have been far more in-depth than it is.

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