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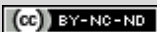
Book Review

Parkes, Colin Murray, and Holly G. Prigerson. Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life. 4th edition. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. 2010. ISBN 978-0-415-45118-5, pp. 368. Price \$59.80 (Hardcover)

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It can probably be said that most human beings experience loss at least once in their lifetime, to be *possibly* followed by grief and/or bereavement. Perhaps the words, concepts and theories associated with these life experiences cannot be articulated by the individual, but the emotion and feelings that arise from the event can be described in a kaleidoscope of words and symptoms that may help the reader understand that the process of bereavement can impact physical and psychological function and may lead to psychological stress. This book focuses on the many ways loss can occur, how people are impacted differently based on the circumstances of the loss, how the process is uniquely individual, the interventions available for the bereaved person, and how one gets to the other side of grief through the bereavement journey.

Generally, a 4th edition book should indicate to the reader that the information contained within the pages are pertinent and readable; updating is necessary to relate the emergence of new ideas, empirical research findings, theoretical advancement, and improved understanding of the topic. In the 4th edition of Parkes classic work, readers will not be disappointed as the chapters are filled with greater depth, implications, and understanding of bereavement based on newer research findings and advancing scientific technology. Dr. Holly Prigerson, from Harvard University and researcher on the acclaimed Yale Bereavement Study, serves as the new co-author.

Some of the new developments in the study of grief and bereavement included in this edition are findings related to: magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and mapping of neuroanatomical grief, cellular chemistry and physiological technologies for studying living cells of grieving individuals, finding meaning and purpose after recovery from a significant loss, attachment theory implications, resilience, transitions, recovery, and effective interventions. Research statistics and findings have been placed in a series of 19 appendices so as to make the book more readable to lay individuals as well as professionals.

The reader is reminded that grief is a normal response to stress. The characteristic states of grief (the term *phases of grief* is no longer utilized) overlap and individuals can move back and forth over a non-defined timeframe, including years after the loss. Grief can be viewed from an orientation perspective involving loss (looking back) and restoration/change (looking forward) which cannot be carried out simultaneously. The impact of major life stresses of limited duration can be explained through application of crisis theory principles. How a human being reacts to a particular stressor varies widely and depends on: any inherited sensitivity to stress, characteristics of the stressor, coping mechanisms, application of previous life experience to the current event, ability to handle powerful emotions, and self-esteem.

Determinants of grief covers chapters 9 – 12 and includes: kinship, gender, age, mode of death, accumulated or multiple losses, personal vulnerability (dependency, avoidance of grief, ambivalence, helplessness), and social and cultural influences. The authors do concede that “a complete explanation for any psychosocial event would be possible only if we knew everything that had preceded it – which clearly can never be the case” (p. 138).

Over the past few decades, a multitude of services have emerged to assist bereaved individuals in the process of their recovery. The authors conclude that over time, most bereaved improve with or without formal interventions. Statistics from some of the reported research indicates that “referral for counseling or other interventions may do more harm than good” (p. 195). This assumption is explained with the caveat that family and friends are the first and most significant form of help for most people. Chapters 13 – 15 offer solid information on helping the bereaved through understanding the multitude of events surrounding loss.

This book is a relevant resource for individuals living with bereavement, their family and friends, health care professionals, and students. When reading this information, one cannot help but think of the life losses experienced by self and others. A new understanding emerges in realizing that loss is an individual experience based on many factors that may or may not lead to grief and bereavement. Seeing things in a different perspective may help self and others in living through another event with a more holistic range of understanding and empathy.