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## Mending the Torn Fabric: For Those Who Grieve and Those Who Want to Help Them

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distinction to ascribe to an "other," whether it is a home intruder or a country's aggressive neighbor who is violating borders through violence. The author's bias is clearly demonstrated in that he reduces an array of group, national, and international events to his constructed dualism, when, in my view, these events are often far more complex or contradictory. For example, "others" often behave like enemies, and this is not merely a construction that we create to divert attention from "in-group" divisiveness or to satisfy other needs. So, while second order cybernetics informs us that we are always part of the system that we are observing, that our own lens creates some of the "reality" that we "see," and the author highlights the destructive ramifications of operating within the confines of an "enemy system," he fails to take into account the extent to which his own lens has shaped "evidence" to fit his paradigm.

Notwithstanding this criticism, I believe that the author is on to something with which we have seemingly made little progress. That is, is it moral and even utilitarian to create and exaggerate distinctions over difference when there is often more commonality in characteristics and purpose between groups? Can we rise above this seeming tendency, when it does exist? Or, is our persistent description of "enemy" some of the "water" that the proverbial fish can never seem to see because it is so immersed in it? We need more conversation about this!

**Mending The Torn Fabric: For Those Who Grieve and Those Who Want to Help Them**, by Sarah Brabant. Amityville, NY: Baywood. Death, Value and Meaning Series, 1996. 162 pp. \$28.95 cloth. ISBN 0-89503-141-8.

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*Mending The Torn Fabric* makes an important contribution to our understanding of the grief process. Written with a sociological perspective, this effective and compassionate book helps to clarify the multilayered, multifaceted impact of a loved one's death. Brabant writes in a personal and engaging style that makes the subject matter easily accessible. The purpose of the book is to provide guidelines and insights within a recognizable framework that will aid those affected by death to make their way through the difficult and sometimes lengthy process of mending. Drawing from professional and personal experience, the author's insights serve surviving loved ones as well as those who want to support and encourage them, lay persons and practitioners alike. The book flows from its initial explanation of the torn fabric analogy and tools for mending, to its later chapter directed to those who want to be of help. The concluding chapter addresses the professional's interest in the book's theoretical foundations. Throughout,

Brabant presents fitting examples to illustrate her points.

*Mending* introduces the analogy of torn fabric to represent what grief looks and feels like in a person's life. This useful and appropriate analogy offers the hope of mending while acknowledging that evidence of the tear will remain. Just as each individual's fabric is unique in condition and texture, so will each tear vary in size, outline and location. The author lays the groundwork for ensuing chapters by defining four different dimensions in the grieving process: *bereavement* — a loss that divides one's life into "before and after;" *grief* — the human response to loss, the depth of pain indicating the degree to which the loss is felt; *grief work* — work that must be done to move through the pain of loss so that the bereaved can come to a point where the pain may be lived with instead of being in control. Finally, the influence of culture is manifested in *mourning* — how we are supposed to respond to death and how we think others will expect us to respond. Because only the bereaved knows the size of the tear and how much it hurts, cultural background may or may not be helpful in the mending process. Except for the final chapter, each concludes with guiding or affirming statements, e.g., "It is my torn fabric. I am more familiar with it than anyone else" and "Needing help is not a sign of weakness."

According to Brabant, the popular five-stage process of grief (denial, bargaining, anger, depression, acceptance) based on the work of Kubler-Ross, suggests a linear progression that is too simple. "Grief does not come with a roadmap or a timetable." The author prefers the term "places" to describe nonhierarchical spaces that the bereaved can occupy at any given time. The insightful shift from "stage" to "place" removes potential feelings of failure or regression (e.g., one might normally re-experience anger after coming to accept the death of a loved one). The book does not claim to describe all of the possible places the bereaved will enter, only the more common ones, which include *denial, anger, depression, sadness, relief, fear, jealousy, and acceptance*. Using well-chosen examples, the author effectively explains and describes these "neither good nor bad places." She also cautions us to avoid places of *guilt, shame, or hate* and clarifies their frequent sources (words like "should" and "ought" are warning signs).

*Mending* discusses the influence of *earlier tears* on our ability to mend. Moreover, we can anticipate and prepare for *future tears* — new losses associated with the original loss. It is heartening to read that a new tear, such as an anniversary reaction, does not represent grief work not yet done. The book provides numerous practical suggestions to help us care for our fabric as we go through the mending process (e.g., rest, exercise, diet, and physical checkup) and recommends crying as "an excellent needle and thread for mending tears." Brabant reassures us that anger is natural, and that what we do with it is what is important.

The analogy extends to methods or tools for mending. Threads and needles can include workshops, support groups, journalizing, scheduling time to talk with a friend, and professional help if needed. The author exhorts, "Do not let anyone, family or friends, pressure you into going to a program you do not want to attend." Because Westerners often overlook the restoring power of ceremonies and rituals, Brabant furnishes guidelines for creating beneficial observances or rites. The book wisely does not avoid more complicated situations (e.g., suicide, multiple deaths, death caused by the action of another, even miscarriage, stillbirth, and abortion). The author's discussion of *delayed grief* and *disenfranchised grief* (i.e., the denial by others of a person's right to feel grief) adds needed insight to bereaved persons who might be disregarded due to family or cultural norms. Brabant's analogy takes us beyond mending to embroidering new designs on fabric undergoing repair.

With valuable do's and don'ts, Chapter Ten directs itself to those who want to help the bereaved. The author reminds us that making someone feel better is not the goal; the helping person is there to affirm, not to fix. Practitioners will appreciate Brabant's suggestions for using the torn fabric analogy, which can be expanded for use with many types of losses and changes, such as with health, marriage, or career. The volume concludes with a highly useful listing of resources for bereaved persons and suggested readings and videos on grief and grief-related issues.

The author's experience and skill in dealing with grief and the grieving serve the reader well. Her approach allows grieving individuals the freedom to seek out their own methods of healing while providing important, balanced, and compassionate guidelines. Bereaved persons are likely to recognize themselves in Brabant's sensitive and practical text, and find new needles and threads to aid them in their mending process. With *Mending*, friends of the bereaved will gain needed direction and avoid common errors. For practitioners, this excellent slim volume provides useful information and insights that apply directly to practice.

#### REFERENCE

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. 1969. *On Death and Dying*. New York: Macmillan.