



On Loss and Losing: Beyond the Medical Model of Personal Distress: 0

Melvyn L. Fein

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All people suffer instances of personal loss that cause distress. All too often, their discomfort is treated as a medical issue requiring treatment—usually through medication. Melvyn L. Fein argues for a broader understanding of loss and losing that offers another approach, which he characterizes as “resocialization.” Indeed, how a person thinks, feels, and acts may all need to be reorganized if personal distress is to be overcome.

Fein urges that we distinguish between the loss of something we once possessed and losing something that never came to fruition. Thus, it is possible never to achieve vital social roles, social statuses, and/or personal bonds, despite our individual efforts. While some of these losses are not necessarily problematic, others are extremely painful. Unfortunately, rather than investigate the source of this discomfort, distraught individuals frequently seek refuge in simplistic solutions. As a consequence, one of the reasons the medical model remains dominant is that the alternative is imperfectly understood.

Fein presents a compelling case for a sociological interpretation of personal distress. Although he acknowledges that some personal suffering derives from biological sources, and that mental illnesses can spill over to cause social dysfunctions, he argues that it is important to recognize the social causes of human suffering. In thereby recognizing the limitations of the human condition, most of us can do better than blindly accept an inherited dedication to the medical model. *On Loss and Losing* offers a legitimate option without denying the reality of human suffering.

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