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Book Reviews

Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion By Theresa Burke, Ph.D., with David C. Reardon, Ph.D.

Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion, a compelling resource for mental health professionals, presents years of post-abortion counseling experiences and research by psychotherapist Theresa Burke, Ph.D. The text is complemented by the post-abortion research of David C. Reardon, Ph.D. Dr. Burke proposes that the effects of abortion have potential to permeate every area of a woman's life and influence various areas of psychotherapy.

Dr. Burke confronts the hidden trauma many women face following abortion. Three groups of women emerged during Burke's years of counseling and research: those who attempt to share their feelings after abortion and are advised to end the discussions; those who refuse to discuss their emotions and allow this to interfere with other areas of life; and those who react with anger and guilt to any mention of abortion. For these groups of women any dialogue concerning post-abortion issues becomes taboo, which can lead to repressed feelings. Burke states as her guiding principle in writing the book: "Grief after abortion is neither expected nor permitted in our society".

With documented research and examples from her clinical practice, Burke examines assumptions that are few, if any, psychological risks involved in abortion. She carefully outlines specific types of post-abortion problems she has counseled since 1986 and relates the dilemma to individuals, families, and our nation. Burke contends that two factors contribute to the denial of the aftermath of abortion: the perception that immediate negative reactions are temporary, and the fact that many negative reactions are delayed.

When Burke examines the perspective of abortion clinics, she carefully studies various purposes and agendas that can exist: directive counseling that minimizes opportunities for questions and discussion of alternatives to abortion; limited information that fails to present the physical process and psychological risks; financial interests that are at stake; and the hidden perception that

abortion can serve as a mechanism for social engineering. She further explains that these scenarios are not necessarily intentional, representative, or without care for the woman involved.

Burke states that her purpose is not to convince the reader that all women who have had an abortion experience direct emotional problems. She seeks to validate that post-abortion trauma does exist and must be confronted. Burke's observations of defense mechanisms prepare the reader for an examination of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A close scrutiny of PTSD in post-abortion women reveals various topics, including feelings of helplessness, violations of physical integrity, questions of the women's role in the abortion, rates of PTSD and delayed PTSD reactions. This naturally leads to a psychological study of memory, PTSD, and re-enactment trauma.

The book investigates correlations between abortion and potentially harmful choices such as sex, suicide, eating disorders, and the illicit use of drugs. Burke refutes the idea that the only women with other coping issues experience post-abortion trauma, contending that women from various backgrounds can be susceptible to the effects of abortion. Burke concludes with "The Labor of Grief and Birth of Freedom", a chapter that encourages the proves of mourning and addresses avenues for healing.

Burke combines her work with Dr. David C. Reardon, founding director of the Elliott Institute, to present findings on the complexity and distortions of post-abortion research as well as psychological reactions reported after abortion. The survey for women who sought post-abortion counseling examines the views of the women both prior to abortion and following abortion. Relationships with men, history of physical abuse, personal relationships and self-destructive tendencies are some of the issues examined in the surveys.

Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion makes the case for discussion and understanding of the need for counseling following abortion. Mental health professionals must be aware of this topic during counseling because it can sometimes be hidden beneath the other issues in an individual's life. This book demands that professionals recognize and examine the trauma of abortion.

About the Author

Dr. Burke holds undergraduate degrees in English communications and social work, and a master's degree and doctorate of philosophy in counseling psychology. Her doctoral dissertation focuses on post-abortion trauma and trauma re-enactment. She is a nationally certified psychologist, a Diplomate of the American Psychotherapy Association, a Licensed Professional Counselor, and a Diplomate of the American Board of Forensic Counselors. She holds membership in the American Counseling Association, the

American Association of Christian Counselors, the Society for Catholic Social Scientists, and the American Academy of Bereavement. She is the founder of Rachel's Vineyard Ministries, which offers support groups and retreats. The ministry has become a model for crisis pregnancy centers and other clinical and ministry outreach programs. Her counseling work has also focused on sexual abuse, eating disorders, anxiety management, bereavement, pregnancy loss and women's issues. As co-administrator and founder of Covenant Family Resources, she has aided in the support of families who adopt.



Rachel's Vineyard Ministries

808 N. Henderson Rd.
King of Prussia, PA 19406
610-354-0555—1-877-HOPE-4-ME