

Rudolf H. Moos (ed.), *Human Adaptation: Coping with Life Crises*. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath & Co., 1976, 447 pp.

While recognizing that major life stresses sometimes bring about severe symptomatology Moos presents here a series of articles that details the ways in which human beings can and do successfully cope with crises and transitions. The book has twelve parts, but upon closer examination three principal divisions emerge.

Part I provides a conceptual base. Some of the dominant influences, such as evolutionary, personality and crisis theories, which have shaped current interest in the field, are reviewed. Various strategies of adaptation are systematically described, illustrating distinctions between such terms as "defense", "mastery", "adaptation" and "coping". Parts II through VIII deal with developmental life transitions, from early childhood through aging, death and bereavement. The final four parts present material on unusual stress situations, including disasters.

All told there are some thirty-five articles, the quality of which is slightly uneven. Most are scholarly, having originally appeared in journals, mainly in the mental health fields. A few were written for the popular press but are nonetheless thoughtful and provocative. One, however, which appears in the disaster section, seems rather more suited to the Reader's Digest.

On the whole, the selections on disaster are representative of much that is written on the topic, if not particularly well chosen for the serious student. In the first, Janis compares nuclear holocausts with other bombing actions. The implication, by virtue of the article's placement in this part, is that wartime incidents are in the same class as other types of disaster. This could be challenged on the grounds that in war there is a common, recognized enemy, and that attacks are somewhat expected and often repetitive. However, a number of factors that do need to be considered in all disasters are touched on, including the extent of damage relative to total resources, the social context in which the event occurs, and the nature of the agent itself.

The piece on the 1974 Xenia tornado is a tearjerker, and an anomaly in a work that purports to focus on the resilience of individuals under stress. Written two months after the event, it is an anecdotal account of a town suffering collective mental malaise. The picture painted neither squares with the findings of extensive research conducted in Xenia, nor does it serve those who earnestly seek to resolve the issues surrounding the actual nature and extent of emotional disturbance following disasters.

A third article, on the flooding in Pennsylvania in 1972, has some practical value. Written by a team of social workers who were involved in crisis intervention with victims, it points up the fact that the major sources of stress lie not so much in the event itself as in the aftermath. There is evidence that the concomitants of tornadoes or explosions or

whatever, are what gives disaster its real meaning to many who are stricken. The uprooting of neighborhoods, displacement of school children, loss of property, of work, of familiar support systems, and the tedium associated with applying for governmental assistance — all form the arena in which individual crises are faced. Actually, given what has just been said, some of the most interesting and suggestive material in the book, from a disaster mental health standpoint, can be found in the parts dealing with children, with relocation, and with death and bereavement.

In general, *Human Adaptation: Coping with Life Crises* should provide worthwhile supplemental reading to diverse health science clinicians, whether in direct service or academic settings.

Barbara S. Baisden
Ohio State University
Disaster Research Center,
Columbus, Ohio