

## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Stress and Coping in Nursing.* R. BAILEY and M. CLARKE. Chapman & Hall, London, 1989. No. of pages: 335. Price: £13.95 paperback.

*Stress and Coping in Nursing* is an interesting and ambitious book on several counts, although it accomplishes some of its goals more effectively than others. Basically, the first part of the book is designed to provide a comprehensive review of the concepts of stress and coping, delineate existing explanatory and predictive models, and present the authors' recommendation for the most elegant and useful model currently available. Subsequent sections of the book consider stress and coping from nursing and patient perspectives. The concluding chapter provides a summarizing and synthesizing section.

The primary strength and interest of the book lie in its attempt to take a truly systemic approach to the field of stress and coping. The authors have the brilliant insight that stress and coping in nursing are relevant concepts, in terms of underlying mechanisms, not only to nurses, but to patients as well (they could easily have added physicians, administrators, clerical staff, etc.). This unique way of examining stress and coping, from a systemic rather than a particularistic viewpoint, highlights the similar psychosocial and pathophysiological responses operating at various times in parallel fashion throughout the entire system.

Unfortunately, this insight does not always receive adequate development in the body of the book. For example, the section on 'indirect coping' for nurses restricts itself to individual stress management techniques, such as relaxation training or systematic desensitization. On the other hand, effective patient coping is shown to involve the existence of support systems. The unintentional implication is that somehow nurses and patients face different issues and thus require different coping strategies. Clearly, there should be no fundamental distinction in how nurses cope and how patients cope, although there may be differences of timing and degree. Omissions like this one inadvertently reinforce the idea of separateness between the two roles considered in the book and make a systemic, interactional understanding more difficult.

Further, it would have been more satisfying to see analyses of stress and coping for nurses and patients

handled in a more integrative fashion. Instead, many of the interactive dimensions between the two are lost because of the structure of the book. For example, we learn about factors associated with stress in nursing training. How might this stress affect patients under the nurses' care? How do their coping strategies interact, both positively and negatively? We never learn. Similarly, in both the nursing section and the patient section, the topics of death and dying are addressed. However, the separate discussions make it appear that these issues are quite different for patients and nurses, when in fact similar underlying fears and anxieties are being activated for both groups. In fairness to the authors, I am not aware of stress and coping research *per se* which takes the systemic viewpoint. However, at least in the discussions of research findings, it would have been possible to bring the two perspectives closer together.

It was also somewhat disappointing that, although meaning and significance figure so strongly for the authors on a theoretical level, these concepts were given short shrift in the discussions of stress management. As a practising clinical psychologist, I am well aware of the biopsychosocial impact of the relaxation response on the individual. However, even Benson (who developed the relaxation response) is now acknowledging that generic relaxation training can be enhanced when it is associated with transpersonal systems of significance to the patient (eg prayer or meditation). It is important not to convey the impression that coping consists of a few 'techniques' to be practised in isolation from the individual's 'psychological constellation of beliefs'. Although I do not believe this was the authors' intent, particularly in the nursing section, it comes across as a subliminal inference.

One final concern is the level of material in the book. Although clearly written, the material included is somewhat simplistic. In areas where I have some background, for example control theory, type A behavior, and death and dying, the discussions fail to incorporate more recent and more sophisticated research and theoretical refinements. The analyses of particular research studies are overly long in some cases as well. Because of these limitations, the book is probably best suited as a textbook for nursing students, who are just beginning to be introduced to the concepts under discussion.

These objections registered, I believe the book makes a valuable contribution in presenting in a clear and articulate manner the cognitive-phenomenological-transactional (CPT) model of stress and coping, based primarily on the work of Richard Lazarus. Although well known and respected in psychological circles, this model has still to make significant inroads in the medical community, precisely for the reasons the authors find it so appealing: it emphasizes subjective idiosyncratic appraisal of stress and, by focusing on individual-environment interactions, it necessarily is somewhat complex. I personally agree with the authors that it is a much more sophisticated explanatory model than Selye, for example, and certainly has wider clinical applicability.

The book makes other useful contributions as well. For example, the authors do an excellent job of clarifying some of the terminology confusions and imprecise usage rampant in the field. Further, in both their discussions

and their case examples, they successfully demonstrate the importance of personal appraisal of stressful events in terms of the individual's psychological and cultural context, another dimension of coping which has received insufficient clinical attention. The book also deserves acknowledgement for recognizing the profound relationship between control theory, significance (or meaning) theory, and conventional formulations of stress and coping.

In summary, *Stress and Coping in Nursing* is a good introductory text, whose strength lies in the highly sophisticated theory of stress and coping which it establishes as a context in which to consider the research presented. Students who can grasp the book's fundamental idea of the interlocking systemic nature of stress and coping will be on the road to taking significantly better care of both themselves and their patients.

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