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Synopsis Books:

The wear and tear of American life has been a topic of public concern ever since the mid-nineteenth century when middle-class men faced pressures to succeed in a newly industrialized society. But although stress is often associated with conditions over which people have little control--workplace policies unfavorable to family life, increasing economic inequality, war in the age of terrorism--the stress concept focuses most of our attention on the ways individuals react to stress. Several decades ago when the stress concept began to gain popularity, it would have been inconceivable that in only a matter of decades we'd be applying it to such divergent conditions as a soldier's nighttime terrors and a manager's tense work day. In this book, Becker argues that our national infatuation with neurobiology and our immersion in the therapeutic culture have created a middle-class moral imperative to manage the tensions of daily life by boosting our coping abilities, our self-esteem or our immune systems, turning our gaze inward and obscuring our view of the social and political conditions that underlie those tensions. The stress concept has come of age in a period of tectonic social and political shifts. Nonetheless, we persist in the all-American belief that we can meet these changes by re-engineering ourselves. Analyzing and interpreting both research and popular representations of stress in cultural terms, Becker follows the evolution of the social uses of the stress concept as it has been transformed into an important vehicle for defining, expressing and containing middle-class anxieties about upheavals in American society.

Tags

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