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# Book Reviews

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**Post-Traumatic Therapy and Victims of Violence**—edited by Frank M. Ochberg, M.D.; New York, Brunner/Mazel, 1988, 384 pages, \$40.

**Aphrodite Matsakis, Ph.D.**

Each of the 16 chapters in *Post-Traumatic Therapy and Victims of Violence* is written by nationally recognized experts in the field of clinical victimology. Each author has had extensive clinical experience with trauma survivors, and each chapter presents a well-organized, well-researched view of the state of the art for a particular victim type. A wide variety of victims are considered: battered women, victims of rape and incest, parents of children who have been murdered, children victimized by violence, survivors and children of survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, refugee survivors of violence and torture, Vietnam veterans, and crime survivors.

While much has been written elsewhere about battered women and incest survivors, the two chapters on women so abused are excellent summaries of current thinking and research on these topics. The majority of the other chapters present relatively new material—for example, recent experiences with Indochinese refugees. The chapters devoted to the biology of psychic trauma, to the role of medication in posttraumatic stress disorder therapy, and to the role of exercise, nutrition, spirituality, and the family in promoting healing provide a much-needed

physiological and sociological perspective on the problem of helping people overcome devastating life experiences.

"Being a victim of crime, a victim of war, a survivor of human cruelty is not the equivalent of being mentally ill," writes Dr. Ochberg in the introductory chapter. This assumption, that victims in treatment "must be understood as normal people who are, for a period of time, thrown dramatically off balance by abnormal events," is echoed by each of the contributors.

This book is written primarily for clinicians, in hopes of replacing any "blame-the-victim" attitudes with a more empathic understanding of the human response to trauma. Although some specific counseling techniques are mentioned, the prime goal of each contributor is rather to give the reader a philosophical or theoretical framework with which to view the trauma survivor and the healing process. Throughout the book, the emphasis is on the strengths and coping skills of the survivors, on victim rights, and on the distinct possibility that positive character traits and prosocial action may follow, as well as facilitate, the healing process. Empowerment and self-determination are the ultimate therapeutic goals.

Many of the contributors address the issue of "secondary wounding." Secondary wounding or "social battering" refers to the process by which victims are victim-

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ized twice: first by human aggression or by a disastrous natural force, and second by the very persons to whom they turn for assistance and support, such as therapists, clergy, and health care workers. The chapters on abused women and incest survivors contain chilling descriptions of how helpers have sometimes inadvertently done more harm than good when guided by their negative projections onto the woman or by their horror at the crimes that these two categories of women represent.

As Dr. Bessel van der Kolk points out in his fascinating chapter on "The Biological Response to Psychic Trauma," at present our ignorance about the human response to overwhelming trauma is great. Given the prevalence of violence in today's world, more research and theory are needed. This book, however, provides a good beginning.

**Psychotherapy of Neurotic Character**—by David Shapiro; New York, Basic Books, 1989, 242 pages, \$22.95.

**Mary Lou Meyers, M.D.**

This volume on psychotherapy by Dr. David Shapiro is a long-awaited companion piece to his *Neurotic Styles* published in 1965 (1). In his new work, Dr. Shapiro sets and meets the major objective of inviting the psychothera-

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