In *Stress in Post-War Britain, 1945-85*, Mark Jackson collates essays that cast light on the ways that stress was both experienced and perceived during the twentieth century. The book has an ambitious scope, covering stress at home and at work, and also theories and models of stress. Despite this wide-ranging scope, the case studies presented provide detailed and thought-provoking analyses of stress in various incarnations. In doing so, the authors give insight into life in post-war Britain that would be of interest to many historians of the period, whether their own interests centre upon the oral histories of a single family or the policies of large-scale organisations. There are also numerous accounts that explore the challenges to medical practitioners of dealing with patients’ stress, which may well be of interest to physicians.

Jackson’s introductory chapter is a readable historiography of stress; it provides a starting-point that would be accessible to an undergraduate-level reader. His discussion of ‘Chronologies of Stress’ provide a helpful synopsis of the historical argument of stress as an old but changing concept versus the argument that stress is a particularly ‘modern’ trend. This introduction is also valuable to readers who might be familiar with a particular aspect of stress, such as psychological theories or industrial welfare measures, because of the way that Jackson draws together his themes of home, work, and theories, to provide a cohesive narrative. He also makes some helpful suggestions of work yet to be done in this emerging field of study, particularly in regard to immigrant communities.

*Stress in Post-War Britain* is an edited volume, but the chapters are remarkably cohesive. It is possible to read chapter after chapter without feeling that there has been excessive repetition or significant disconnect in topic. The book’s 11 chapters are grouped into two sections, ‘Stress at Home and Work’ and ‘Models of Stress’, but a particular strength of this volume is the way that it analyses both experiences and models of stress, linking the everyday and the expert. Some chapters provide a very intimate picture of stress, particularly Pamela Richardson and Nicole Baur’s contributions which are based on specific families. Others seek to explore responses to stress, for instance Debbie Palmer analyses two studies conducted on Civil Service stress and Chris Millard explores responses to attempted suicide.

Despite the book’s division into two sections, many chapters draw together experiences and expert opinions on stress. For instance, Jill Kirby’s investigation of ‘Working too Hard’ relates ordinary people’s efforts to make sense of stress to expert theories of stress. Edgar Jones’ chapter on psychosomatic stomach complaints discusses both how patients reported their stress and how medics sought an understanding of the physical manifestations of stress. The complexity of the interrelation between the ways that people felt stress and the ways that experts theorised about stress is at the fore. Rather than attempting to define ‘stress’ in twentieth-century Britain, Jackson and the contributors to this volume explore the implications of the concept being so ill-defined. Joseph Melling particularly draws out the ‘imprecision and elasticity in the terminology of stress’ (p. 162). *Stress in Post-War Britain* therefore presents an interesting example to those interested in communication between experts and the lay-public, giving an example of an idea whose shifting conceptualisation was neither top-down nor bottom-up.
One chapter seemed slightly less of an ideal fit for the volume, despite being a valuable contribution to the field of stress in the twentieth century. The chapter on ‘Food Allergy, Mental Illness, and Stress since 1945’ provides an interesting discussion of different approaches to the same problem: allergies and stress. Matthew Smith highlights how practitioners from various backgrounds argued over whether stress caused, or was caused by, allergies. Whilst the chapter introduction focuses on a British case, the majority of the chapter concerns experts and organisations in America, and only returns to the same individual British case in the conclusion. It is possible that similar discussions, negotiations, and interactions were happening in Britain, but if this is the case then it could have been stated more explicitly. Nonetheless, this book has a great deal to offer those interested in twentieth-century Britain.

The contributors to Stress in Post-War Britain address several broader historical themes. For instance, though only two chapter titles explicitly refer to gender (Ali Haggett’s ‘Gender, Stress and Alcohol Abuse’ and Mark Jackson’s ‘Men and Women Under Stress’), many authors explore how both experiences of stress and models of stress were influenced by assumptions about gender. Contributors highlight assumptions that women experienced stress differently to men, for instance the idea that women did not do anything important enough to become stressed about, or that they were inherently less resilient to any sort of strain. Assumptions about masculinity and stress are also explored, particularly in relation to psychosomatic disorders. Class is also a recurring topic. Experts variously argued that the lower classes were more susceptible to stress related illness, often because they were inferior, or that middle class managers were more susceptible because they were so diligent.

This book is a stimulating collection of essays that situate stress in a wider context whilst also providing the close analysis of a collection of case studies. It deserves to be very widely read.

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