

Preface

The Psychology of Adjustment and Coping is especially intended for use as a primary text for college students taking a psychology of adjustment course. However, this book could also aptly serve as a primary or supplemental text for several other psychology courses (e.g., stress and coping, health psychology, human relations, psychology of loss/death and dying, mental health issues, applied psychology), and other related fields in the social or health sciences (e.g., social work, human services, allied health, nursing, and interdisciplinary studies).

My motivation to undertake this book-writing project grew from a personal frustration of not finding a college textbook that views the study of adjustment in the way that I (and many other academic psychologists) view it: the study of how we cope with life change—including change due to negative events. Moreover, I believe that many other adjustment texts are extremely expensive and needlessly verbose. *The Psychology of Adjustment and Coping* introduces students to the field in a thorough, yet concise, way. In that respect, my text is written in a conversational, student-friendly style that features the major qualities of the field without becoming overly dense in its focus.

In the past, an adjustment course has been treated as either a watered down version of general psychology, or as a vehicle to teach personal growth or other related life skills. Due to somewhat limited adjustment titles, some instructors may have felt a need to use non-academic texts as a means to convey key themes regarding the study of adjustment. I would say that the field of adjustment is moving away from these traditions. This particular text highlights what this field is about today: the study of how we adjust and cope to life change (with an emphasis on adverse events). The practical applications of adjustment and coping, an ongoing challenge for this field, are extensively covered in my book as well.

While I might frame the material somewhat differently than other adjustment texts, most of the topics covered in *The Psychology of Adjustment and Coping* are ones that instructors generally expect to see in such a text (e.g., stress, relationships, therapy, and health). Perhaps the only exception is that my book does not discuss child or adolescent development in much detail, as this is a text that focuses on adjustment and coping processes of adults. In addition, several topical areas that I cover likely would not be featured in other adjustment texts, such as adjustment related to 9/11, the Civil Rights movement, and the Holocaust. Furthermore, the general organization of my book frames this subject matter in a creative way. For instance, the fact that I discuss physical and mental health in a single chapter is fairly unique. Unlike other adjustment books, my chapter on getting help is not limited to a discussion of therapy. For instance, adjustment texts do not feature a chapter on death and dying as I do. My framing of cognitive and interpersonal methods of coping is also an innovative approach.

Teaching a psychology of adjustment course presents an extremely challenging endeavor. A significant reason for this is that there often is a difference of opinion amongst psychologists as to exactly what constitutes the psychology of adjustment field. Unlike other, more well-defined and established areas of psychology (such as social, cognitive, or clinical psychology), the study of adjustment is an area that sometimes is either very broadly or narrowly defined. I believe that the amorphous or hazy focus of this field is one of the more significant challenges facing its instructors.

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An exciting aspect of this text is that it can be used in such a way as to accommodate many different philosophical and pedagogical approaches to the study of adjustment and coping. For instance, oftentimes *how* a particular instructor wants to define psychology of adjustment determines *both* the approach taken to the course and the criteria used in selecting a text. Instructors of this course can use a myriad of approaches that are seemingly paradoxical. This course can be viewed as a more elementary survey class or as an intermediate (or even advanced) class that is more rigorous and comprehensive. This course can also be taught in a way that emphasizes its theoretical nature or so that the course emphasizes its larger, real-world applications. Frankly, the manner in which I teach my own adjustment course represents a unique hybrid of all of these approaches! This field also draws from many discrete psychological subfields—particularly social, personality, health, and clinical psychology. While it is a challenge to balance these opposing approaches, it is possible to incorporate these disparate (though interconnected) perspectives. I would humbly add that, to date, I have successfully taught the psychology of adjustment on several dozen different occasions incorporating these perspectives.

My text also features various personal narratives and “real-life” examples with the hope that students have a greater appreciation for this field and its palpable ties to applied settings. I hope that those who read *The Psychology of Adjustment and Coping* will reap some personal benefits in thinking about how this material relates to their own lives. In the many times that I have taught an adjustment course, I have found it to be a course like no other. The material covered often touches on some very sensitive issues for students. For instance, in my experience with the adjustment course, students have discussed personal matters about coping with the loss of a child, being a victim of rape or incest, and living with paralysis. That's why my text speaks to students in a very sensitive manner, while still maintaining a clear academic tone. In doing so, I am able to frame issues in a way that relates to a student's real-world problems and concerns.

Once again, *The Psychology of Adjustment and Coping* is primarily intended for use as an introductory level text for students in psychology of adjustment and/or coping courses. Most of the material for this text has been class-tested many times over in my own psychology of adjustment course. *While this book has been written for students who have never had a course in psychology, it would also be appropriate for post-introductory psychology level students.* I will be presenting and discussing the material in a user-friendly manner for both introductory and upper-level psychology students. However, the key target audience would be introductory level students who likely have not had much of an introduction (if any) to the field of psychology. Given that this text will be drawing from many disparate sources, as noted earlier in this preface, it could also be used for many other courses within and beyond psychology. While this text is not designed to be a self-help book, general readers who have an interest in the psychology of adjustment and coping may find this work to be appealing as well.

As you can see from the Table of Contents, *The Psychology of Adjustment and Coping* contains nine chapters (and two appendices) that are divided into three basic parts as follows.

Part One is titled *Understanding Psychological Adjustment*. This first set of chapters is designed to give students a clearer understanding of what is meant by adjustment and coping (Chapter 1). Chapter 2 explores factors that impact “everyday” adjustment such as personality, gender, and work. The issue of how we experience stress and emotion and how we perceive events as “positive” or “negative” is discussed in Chapter 3.

Part Two (*Applying Adjustment in the Real World: Focusing on Select Events That Require Adjustment*) explores several important issues to which adults often have to adjust in their lives: physical and mental health issues (Chapter 4), close relationships (Chapter 5), and death and dying (Chapter 6). Students are given a concise but complete exposure to these research fields.

Part Three explores *Ways of Coping*. These last chapters expose students to a wide variety of cognitive (Chapter 7) and interpersonal methods of coping (Chapter 8). There is also a chapter on ways of getting help, including information on therapy, (Chapter 9). I have also included an Appendix (A) on research methods for those instructors who may want to discuss its relevance to the study of adjustment and coping. Should instructors opt to cover this material, it would probably be most logical to do so after reviewing the first chapter.

Each chapter also features summaries of key points and objectives, select quizzes to reinforce learning (along with answers contained in a separate Appendix B), and additional thought questions. All of these features are designed to further student understanding and application of the material.

Several additional supplements for both instructors (e.g., test bank, PowerPoint lecture slides, and an instructor's manual) and students (e.g., study guide) are available for this text. Another exciting and potentially appealing feature for instructors is that this text can be modified to further accommodate instructor preferences within the design of this book for a given instructor's course. Please visit www.bvtpublishing.com for more information about the availability of these materials.

In closing, I would like to add my hope that readers of *The Psychology of Adjustment and Coping* will have a greater appreciation of how the issues of adjustment and coping apply to the reality of everyday life. While most areas of psychology can have an applied quality, this field—by definition—speaks to some of the most intimate aspects of our lives. Even though life change need not be adverse, individuals typically have the greatest difficulty adjusting to self-perceived negative thoughts, events, or experiences. One of my all-time favorite quotes is from the famed German philosopher Fredrich Nietzsche: “What does not destroy me, makes me stronger.” I believe Nietzsche is correct. Others may struggle to see it that way. Frankly, I find cases where individuals find strength in the midst of personal struggle and adversity to be quite inspirational. To offer one such example, I was recently reminded of a 1993 speech from famed basketball coach Jimmy Valvano. Valvano gave his speech, where he accepted an ESPY award, literally a few weeks before his death. He told his audience: “Cancer can take away all of my physical abilities. It cannot touch my mind, it cannot touch my heart, and it cannot touch my soul. And those three things are going to carry on forever.” He went on to add “Don’t give up. Don’t ever give up.” I hope that these words further help you to appreciate how psychological adjustment and coping can allow us to show great strength, even in our darkest times.