

Charles A. Chandessais. *Comportements Associés aux Catastrophes. Tomes I & II.* Paris, France: Centre d'Etudes Psychosociologiques des Sinistres et de leur Prévention, 1976, 190 pp.

This mimeographed document, written entirely in the French language, has as its goals: (1) the establishment of an inventory of theoretical and applied studies on the topic of panic and other behaviours associated with disasters, and (2) the construction of a synthesis of research findings to date. Unfortunately, the reader seeking an exhaustive bibliography or an authoritative theoretical synthesis will be disappointed, for the book is uneven in its coverage of the literature and is apparently oriented more toward practitioners in France than to international academics.

The first chapter provides a general introduction to some of the concepts and typologies used in the social scientific study of disasters. While this would be useful for a French language audience, an English language reader would be better advised to turn to Russell Dynes' *Organized Behaviour in Disaster*.

In its subsequent chapters the book becomes in some ways a social psychological counterpart to Dynes' social organizationally oriented book, although Dynes' is more rigo-

rous. (These differing theoretical emphases are consistent with the respective research thrusts of the Disaster Research Center, which Dynes co-directed, and l'Institut International de Feu, which is part of Le Centre d'Etudes Psychosociologiques des Sinistres et de leur Prévention, which Chandessais directs in Paris).

Chandessais' review of the panic literature in Chapter 2 reveals little that is new to the English language reader. Sharing the frustrations of those of us working in this field, he adopts Lewis Killian's conclusion that panic cannot be scientifically studied because it cannot be scientifically defined. He therefore recommends a shift in research emphasis to what he feels are more fruitfully studied and/or manipulated phenomena, such as emotional contagion (!), and in Chapter 3, warning and communications systems.

In Chapters 3 and 4 the bind in which the author finds himself becomes evident. That is, he is attempting to synthesize the findings of an American-dominated field and make them relevant for practitioners in France. The problem, of course, is that the generalizability of American findings to France is often questionable. As a result the monograph frequently dwells disproportionately long on the findings of his own research centre in France, while giving spotty and uneven coverage to recent literature from elsewhere in the world. In this regard, particularly noteworthy by its absence from Chapter 3 was any mention of the detailed empirical work of Joseph Scanlon and his associates in Canada on the topic of chains of interpersonal communication in disaster.

Chapter 4 devotes much attention to irrationality and the causal role of attitudinal predispositions and cognitions of persons involved in disasters. Although the question of egocentric versus altruistic behaviour in times of stress is a major concern in this chapter, Chandessais curiously omits any consideration of the insights which the recent literature on bystander non-involvement has to offer. This chapter also contains a brief discussion of the

concept "disaster subculture", which this reviewer found somewhat surprising in light of the author's definition of a disaster. In that definition (p.4) he says that a disaster falls outside the collectivity's usual frame of reference and that in its repertoire of usual behaviours the collectivity has no response adapted to the situation. This definition seems to imply that a tornado devastating a city possessing a disaster subculture is not really a disaster at all.

Other problems with this monograph are the author's reluctance to adopt a critical stance towards the literature he is reviewing; the proliferation of diagrams which are not always needed (Volume II is comprised entirely of twenty-six diagrams and four hundred and two footnotes); and incomplete bibliographic citations.

On the positive side one could cite the author's attempt (p.6) to draw the concept of "impact mitigation" into a broader theoretical framework (game theory) by viewing it in terms of strategies of preservation, his occasional use of mathematical sociology, and (from the standpoint of a North American reader), his bringing to light of some European studies and concerns. An example of the latter would be the European concern with the role of the judiciary system in the recovery and restoration period. While this is a "natural" object of study for French researchers, given their emphasis upon fire-related disasters, it has to this reviewer's knowledge, received little attention in North America, perhaps because of the predominance of functionalist rather than conflict theory orientations in North American disaster research.

In concluding, it can be said that although the book has limited "pay-off" for English academic readers, it should be of more use to community-level officials involved in disaster response in France.

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