



Healing Dramas and Clinical Plots: The Narrative Structure of Experience (Cambridge Studies in Medical Anthropology)

Cheryl Mattingly

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There is growing interest in "therapeutic narratives" and the relation between narrative and healing. Cheryl Mattingly's ethnography of the practice of occupational therapy in a North American hospital investigates the complex interconnections between narrative and experience in clinical work. Viewing the world of disability as a socially constructed experience, it presents fascinatingly detailed case studies of clinical interactions between occupational therapists and patients, many of them severely injured and disabled, and illustrates the diverse ways in which an ordinary clinical interchange is transformed into a dramatic experience governed by a narrative plot. Drawing on a wide range of sources, including anthropological studies of narrative and ritual, literary theory, phenomenology and hermeneutics, this book develops a narrative theory of social action and experience. While most contemporary theories of narrative presume that narratives impose an artificial coherence upon lived experience, Mattingly argues for a revision of the classic mimetic position. If narrative offers a correspondence to lived experience, she contends, the dominant formal feature which connects the two is not narrative coherence but narrative drama. Moving and sophisticated, this book is an innovative contribution to the study of modern institutions and to anthropological theory.

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