

Theater of Disorder: Patients, Doctors, and the Construction of Illness

Brant Wenegrat



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There are certain phenomena, such as hypnosis, hysteria, multiple personality disorder, recovered memory syndrome, claims of satanic ritual abuse, alien abduction syndrome, and culture-specific disorders that, although common, are difficult to explain completely.

The purpose of this volume is to apply a model of social relations to these phenomena in order to provide a different explanation for them. Wenegrat argues that they are socially constructed illness roles or purposive behavior patterns into which patients fall while receiving either unintentional or intentional cues during interactions with caretakers and authority figures. The application of the social-relations model raises some important, yet previously overlooked, questions about these phenomena. It also illustrates some important aspects of human nature and consciousness, places illness behaviors in their larger, cultural context, and shows the way to a new and different view of mental life.

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