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Good Days, Bad Days: The Self and Chronic Illness in Time

Kathy Charmaz

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Kathy Charmaz has written a compelling book on chronic illness and the effect it has on the self-concepts of those who suffer. It will appeal to anyone facing a long-term problem that seems beyond control. Her work is based on interviews with people suffering from such diseases as cancer, multiple sclerosis, and arthritis, and with their caregivers. Charmaz looks at how these people disclose their illness, how they experience their emotions, and how they manage daily life.

Illness provides a mirror that allows sufferers to see themselves and to become more introspective. As they struggle for control over illness and control over time, they also struggle to control the central images of the self. For example, the chronically ill may situate their self-concepts in the past, present, or future. Charmaz examines under what conditions they situate their self-concepts in each of those timeframes. People may say they live one day at a time. They may bracket certain experiences, such as a heart attack, as timemarkers or turning points in the past. Or they may look ahead to recovering their health. Or ahead to death.

Charmaz artfully combines near jargon-free analysis with moving stories about how people have experienced illness, usually told in the sufferers' own words. She enters the world of the chronically ill, and brings us into it.

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India Mead:

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