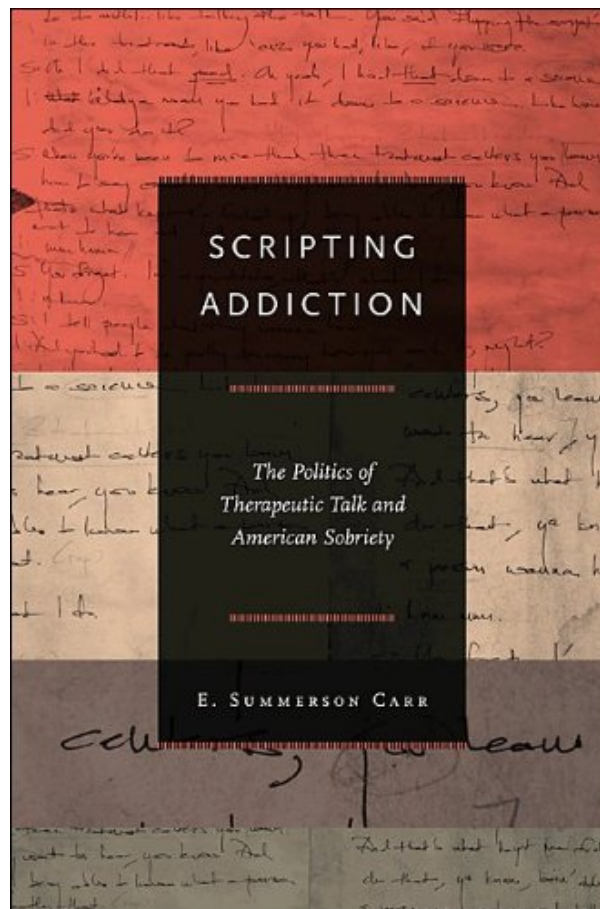
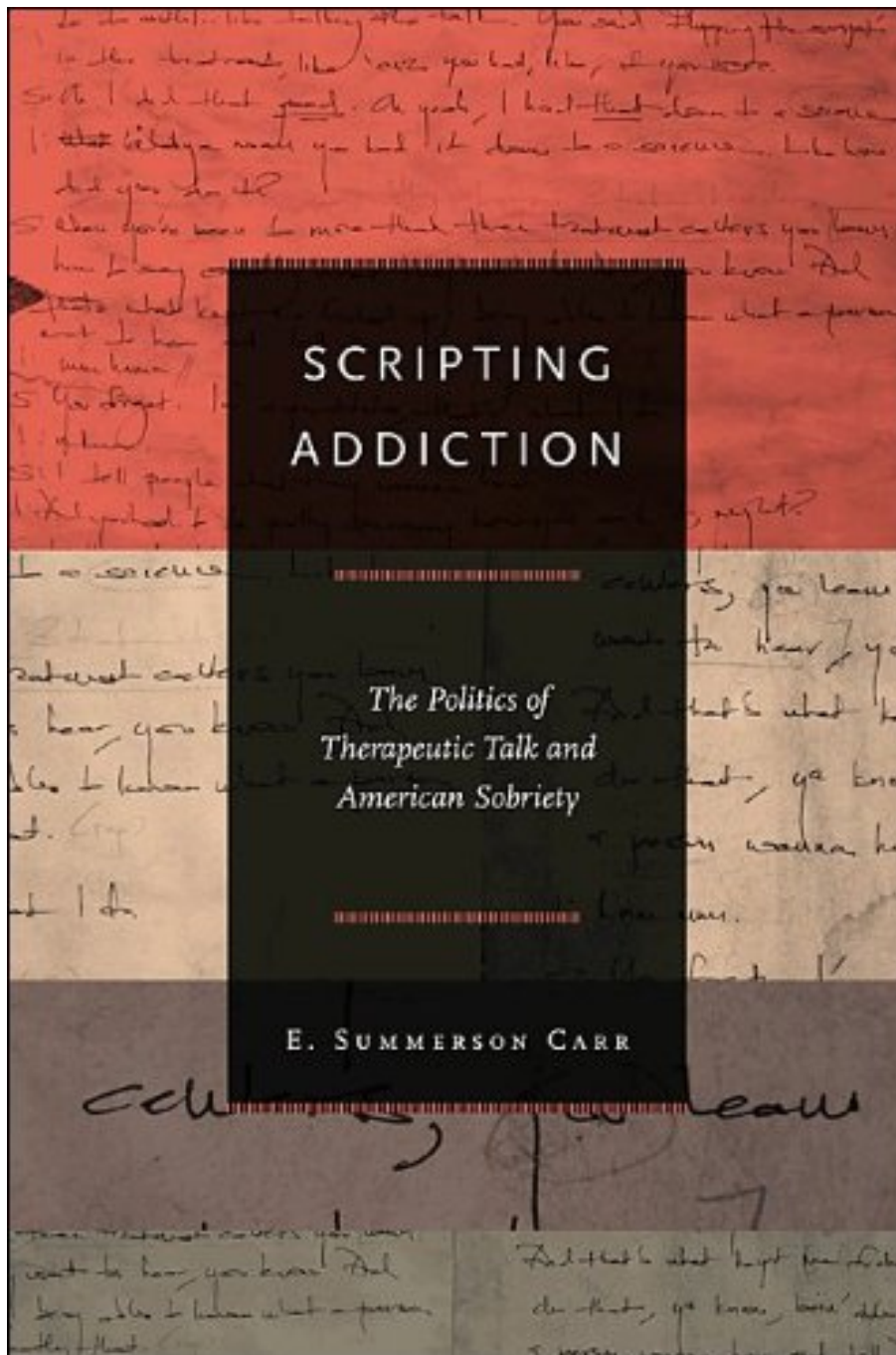


SCRIPTING ADDICTION: THE POLITICS OF THERAPEUTIC TALK AND AMERICAN SOBRIETY BY E. SUMMERSON CARR



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Scripting Addiction takes readers into the highly ritualized world of mainstream American addiction treatment. It is a world where clinical practitioners evaluate how drug users speak about themselves and their problems, and where the ideal of "healthy" talk is explicitly promoted, carefully monitored, and identified as the primary sign of therapeutic progress. The book explores the puzzling question: why do addiction counselors dedicate themselves to reconciling drug users' relationship to language in order to reconfigure their relationship to drugs?

To answer this question, anthropologist Summerson Carr traces the charged interactions between counselors, clients, and case managers at "Fresh Beginnings," an addiction treatment program for homeless women in the midwestern United States. She shows that shelter, food, and even the custody of children hang in the balance of everyday therapeutic exchanges, such as clinical assessments, individual therapy sessions, and self-help meetings. Acutely aware of the high stakes of self-representation, experienced clients analyze and learn to effectively perform prescribed ways of speaking, a mimetic practice they call "flipping the script."

As a clinical ethnography, Scripting Addiction examines how decades of clinical theorizing about addiction, language, self-knowledge, and sobriety is manifested in interactions between counselors and clients. As an ethnography of the contemporary United States, the book demonstrates the complex cultural roots of the powerful clinical ideas that shape therapeutic transactions--and by extension administrative routines and institutional dynamics--at sites such as "Fresh Beginnings."

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Most helpful customer reviews

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

A Crucial and Careful Study

By P. Quinn

This is a patient, exhaustive and exacting ethnographic study. It forces one to think at once about social welfare policies, ideas of drug treatment, the limits and potentials of language and, maybe most of all, about the daily struggles of so many U.S. institutions charged with undoing addiction and dependency. The book's own careful act of undoing is in its thorough deconstruction of the assumed divide between therapist and client in such institutions. Instead of the addict-in-denial and the therapist determining "Truth," this book shows clients acutely aware of the roles they are expected to play and the language they are expected to use - to keep their kids, to stay in the program, to have a roof over their heads - while we see, in sometimes

excruciating detail, the lengths therapists are forced to go to maintain their program's funding and bolster their own "authority." Everyone interested in poverty and policy, therapeutic regimens, political agency and semiotics and institutions should read and consider this ethnography.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Insightful and True

By R. Middlebrook

This was a compelling read. Compassionate as well, smartly written, indeed illuminating on this subject that begs such exploration. Carr's book not only turns an anthropological eye on drug treatment, it treats the overlap of language and drug addicts and politics with the respect required to be properly understood. This is thorough work, while at the same time most engaging. Highly recommended, intriguing and an absolutely necessary read for anyone looking to explore this most topical of subject matters. This book hits all the marks.

1 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

First Impressions

By Amazon Customer

Ms. Carr has certainly done her research well, is very familiar with addiction treatment. How language is used in the subject of study she generalizes to other addiction treatment settings. She says at the heart of the treatment approach is a ritualized language the counselors use to indoctrinate the clients in treatment. If the clients "flip the script" they can sound like they're getting it. In other words, they can fake it, like one client, Nikki, does in the book. Yes, the author is absolutely right, that's talking the talk. Experienced addiction counselors know that clients who are truly in a process of change become willing to do the hard work recovery requires. She raises the interesting question of whether treatment produces real change or not.

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