Unstrange Minds: Remapping the World of Autism

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Autism is no longer considered a rare, stigmatized disorder; it's one that touches the lives of an increasing number of individuals worldwide. Grinker, director of the George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Research, is one example of this phenomenon. Driven by the 1994 autism diagnosis his daughter, Isabel, received, Grinker endeavors to collect the myriad scientific, historical and cultural components of autism into an accessible primer.

The book is divided into two parts—academic and anecdotal—throughout which the author illustrates his daughter's development and how his family has coped and developed alongside her.

The first section recounts the history of autism, from the illness's initial description in 1943, its once taboo status and the erroneously cited causes of autism. Special attention is given to the evolving diagnostic criteria and the increase in prevalence rates.

In the emotionally powerful second portion, Grinker details the experiences of parents of autistic children in South Africa, South Korea and India, how their respective societies view the disorder (often negatively) and the obstacles surmounted to increase awareness of autism, its treatment and management. While this grounds the book, the lengths to which Grinker goes to prove to the parents of autistic children they are not alone needn't have been so extensive.

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