

## Storying Autism



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**Abstract:** In this essay, I review three recent monographs: Jordynn Jack's *Autism and Gender*, Anne McGuire's *War on Autism*, and Melanie Yergeau's *Authoring Autism*. Each of these texts centers disability—autism in particular—and in doing so, they highlight the insidious ways in which our cultural, institutional, and personal autism narratives support extant social hierarchies that sideline autistic lives in scholarship and beyond. Central to these three books are issues of rhetorical play, textual narrative, and storying in contemporary autism discourse, so in this essay I aim to tie together these fundamental themes, placing them in conversation with one another. I begin the discussion with a brief overview of the history of autism before drawing from Yergeau, Jack, and McGuire's texts to explore the lay of the discursive field of autism and forms of rhetorical (and physical) violence that are normalized in autism discourse. Finally, before concluding, I explore what the authors of these texts explicate about the rhetors who take part in a shifting discursive field.

Jack, Jordynn. *Autism and Gender: From Refrigerator Mothers to Computer Geeks*. U of Illinois P, 2014. 306 pp.

McGuire, Anne. *War on Autism: On the Cultural Logics of Normative Violence*. U of Michigan P, 2016. 264 pp.

Yergeau, Melanie. *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*. Duke UP, 2017. 302 pp.

In this essay, I review three recent monographs: Jordynn Jack's *Autism and Gender*, Anne McGuire's *War on Autism*, and Melanie Yergeau's *Authoring Autism*. Each of these texts centers disability—autism in particular—and in doing so, they highlight the insidious ways in which our cultural, institutional, and personal autism narratives support extant social hierarchies that sideline autistic lives in scholarship and beyond. Central to these three books are issues of rhetorical play, textual narrative, and storying in contemporary autism discourse, so in this essay I aim to tie together these fundamental themes, placing them in conversation with one another. I begin the discussion with a brief overview of the history of autism before drawing from Yergeau, Jack, and McGuire's texts to explore the lay of the discursive field of autism and forms of rhetorical (and physical) violence that are normalized in autism discourse. Finally, before concluding, I explore what the authors of these texts explicate about the rhetors who take part in a shifting discursive field.

## Discovering and Delivering Autism

Autism, also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is officially classified as a neurodevelopmental disability that is defined, per the American Psychiatric Association (APA), as a condition in which neurological functioning is impaired. This so-called impairment, suggests the APA, contributes to a range of social and communication difficulties that expresses in ways that are unique to the autistic person but also recognizable to certified experts according to the standards established in the diagnostic manual ("What"). Autism, therefore, is defined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* as a disorder in which there are "problems with thinking, feeling, language and the ability to relate to others" (APA "What"). This understanding undergirds conceptualizations of autism as lack and sponsors notions of autism's "unknowable, unnarratable" nature (Yergeau 7).

Conceiving of autism as lack is foundational to how it has been defined as a biomedical classification. In 1943, the Austrian-American psychiatrist Leo Kanner published his seminal study "Autistic Disturbances of Affective Contact." Interestingly, separate but concurrent investigations were conducted by Hans Asperger, an Austrian pediatrician,

who described in a 1944 article four boys he understood to experience *autistic psychopathy*. The condition, which had once been viewed as a form of childhood schizophrenia, was marked by “a lack of empathy, little ability to form friendships, one-sided conversations, intense absorption in a special interest, and clumsy movements” (Attwood 11). Asperger’s “autistic psychopathy” would later be termed Asperger’s Syndrome, the now defunct classification that was ultimately understood to represent a form of so-called “high-functioning autism.” With her 1981 publication, “Asperger Syndrome: A Clinical Account,” Lorna Wing introduced Asperger’s Syndrome to a United States biomedical community, paving the way for Uta Frith’s influential *Autism and Asperger Syndrome* in 1992, after which these conditions, though “discovered” and explicated separately, were formally recognized as describing disorders under the same umbrella.

Setting autism and Asperger’s Syndrome in conversation with one another was remarkably productive for the biomedical community, and the APA began conceiving of their autism criteria as less categorical and more dimensional (McGuire 51, 212). Though many criteria were still following the categorical mode, shifts toward a dimensional model speak to broader changes in the approach to diagnosing psychiatric disorders in the 1980s (see Kraemer et al.; Potuzak et al.). We see that by 1994, in the fourth text-revised edition of the *DSM*, autism was formally recognized as a spectrum disorder constituted by five distinct but related pervasive developmental disorders (American Psychiatric Association). These included autistic disorder (or Kanner’s autism), Asperger’s syndrome, Rett’s syndrome, childhood integrative disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder - not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). Since 2013, with the publication of the fifth edition of the *DSM*, autism, though still conceived of as a spectrum, no longer consists of those five distinct psychiatric classifications. Rather, those classifications have been either decommissioned or effectively subsumed to the overarching label, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In addition, today, the very notion of an autism spectrum has come under fire, with autistic activists and non-autistic allies beckoning us to rethink, and perhaps dissolve, the metaphor (Yergeau 33, 40, 51, 139, 189; Thomas and Boellstorff).

Historical transformations in autism’s classification do not only speak to the activities of certified experts in biomedicine and parents of autistic children. In Jordynn Jack’s *Autism and Gender*, Anne McGuire’s *War on Autism*, and Melanie Yergeau’s *Authoring Autism*, we learn that these transformations also have encoded within them, attestations to and contestations of extant notions of normalcy and culpability. In *Autism and Gender*, Jack explores the cross-cutting influence of gender and rhetoric in the “discovery” and development of the classification. She shows that early (and ostensibly concurrent) clinical studies of Kanner and Asperger in the 1940s, focused predominantly on the behavioral and emotional habits of young boys with autism and laid the groundwork for a highly gendered conception of the “spectrum” that persists in autism discourse and is actively resisted by autistic activists today. Simon Baron-Cohen for example has posited that autism is essentially a condition of disordered masculinity. Autistic women, Baron-Cohen’s theory goes, have hypermasculine brains while autistic men have hypomasculine brains. Addressing Baron-Cohen’s theorizations of autism, Yergeau aptly asserts that such “constructions” are “rooted in misogynistic and scientific reduction” (Yergeau 68). Such theories, she proposes, “forward a normatively entelechial understanding of in/voluntarity” that “envisions cognitive landscapes that, thanks to hormonal cocktails, hold wills and causes unto themselves” (Yergeau 71).

In her text, Jack demonstrates that these gendered conceptualizations of autism shape in potent ways our understandings of who counts as a legitimate autistic person, and who ought to be represented in the discursive field. With this insight in-hand, she presents a compelling call to action: biomedical researchers and autism studies scholars must be vigilant in engaging critically with gender. In parsing out the rhetorical characters that abide in autism discourse and the soup of rhetorical play from which they emerge and by which they are sustained and transformed, Jack opens up opportunities for understanding how gender works and how it is *doing* things in the world of autism.

In *War on Autism*, Anne McGuire also traces out the history of the classification. She highlights the multiplicity of forms that made possible a “Western/izing conception of autism” as well as the “emergence of contemporary versions of autism advocacy” (McGuire 27). Drawing on Majia H. Nadesan’s work, McGuire asserts that autism was “delivered” by a complex of phenomena that were contingent upon not only the particularities of the Western cultural context but also on the historical context that made autism a thing that could be recognized and effectively defined. In outlining the cornerstone studies in the history of the autism classification, she sets the scene and populates it with embodiments of those who are given the authority to look (allistics or non-autistics) and those who are to be probed, examined, or looked at (autistics). These are the characters that McGuire explicates, the *advocate* and the *advocated for*. McGuire shows that the predominant narratives emerging from discursive field in which autism and autism advocacy abide, and in which notions of normalcy and the fit or unfit citizen get reified, establish a high threshold or level of tolerance for violence enacted against those claimed to be advocated for, autistic people. As we learn from McGuire, Yergeau, and Jack, manifestations of violence are made routine, normalized, through the production and reproduction of cultural and institutional narratives that establish autism as a threat and call us to war

against it.

## Characterizing Autism Discourse and Rhetorical Violence

In each of the three texts discussed in this essay, we find that in the production of autism narratives, at cultural, institutional, and interpersonal scales, there is the creation, description, and performance of “stock characters” or “personae that appear in autism discourse” (Jack 2). Rhetors embody and perform these characters to buttress their claims of expertise on autism and support their performances of authority and legitimacy as they engage in ongoing debates. Jack explains that the gendered characters of autism that emerge in the West, become embodied, gain persuasive power in the discursive field, and are then judged or assessed (Jack 4). Yet, all characters do not wield such persuasive power. Yergeau explains that scholarly presuppositions about autistic people’s “degraded rhetoric,” their “lacking rhetorical facility and audience awareness ... lacking self-reflection,” deny the ability to produce narratives and therefore subvert the “narrative value” they possess (Yergeau 7).

McGuire is similarly interested in the production of characters or roles. In particular, she is concerned with the production of the advocate and the advocated for. Jack, Yergeau, and McGuire show in their respective texts how ASD’s history maps onto the rhetorical production of these characters in ways that are not neutral but always political and consequential for the forms autism discourse takes. And in putting these works in conversation with one another, we may glean that they are each asking after how the available “rhetorical characters” encoded in the narratives of parents, autistic people, non-autistic advocates, biomedical experts, and politicians are productive as they reproduce, reorient to, and resist conceptions of autism, what it is, and how it works. These narratives, we find, also make apparent cultural understandings of gender, normalcy, and violence.

Striving to make sense of the autism narrative, Jack carefully shows that it is one that is active, multiple, mutable, and inflected with a complex of power relations that are constituted in and through participation in the discursive field. In particular, Jack explains that the dominant autism narrative entrains, or synchronizes, its audience’s vision to that of medical experts by providing an interpretive lens through which to view autism—the classification—and autisticness—as embodied by those diagnosed and/or self-identifying as autistic persons (Jack 2). This is highly resonant with McGuire’s explication in *War on Autism*. McGuire highlights how cultural and institutional narratives of autism and developmental disability (coming out of biomedicine and many autism advocacy organizations) also put forward narratives that entrain vision in part through the kinds of outlines or templates for the characters of the autism advocate and the autistic person who is advocated for. These narratives provide portraits of normalcy based on the designated acceptable pace for human development, for example, and prepare able-bodied individuals to detect indicators of autism and respond swiftly. In this way, the accounts define normalcy’s opposite, which is embodied by the “delayed” or out of sync development of the autistic child or individual. Consequently, McGuire shows, built into the prevailing autism narrative is the accepted problem—autism—and its lone solution—a swift and forceful reprisal that aims to “save” or “recover” existing autistic children.

In spite of their disparate foci, with Jack examining autism and gender, McGuire taking on the production of normative violence against autistic people, and Yergeau exploring the storying of autism from autistic and non-autistic vantage points, they each demonstrate that the structural violence and consequent bodily violence levied against autistic people is closely linked to cultural narratives of the tragedy of autism. They key into a central problem: the dominant narrative of autism’s dysfunction and tragedy generates sites of irredeemability wherein autistic individuals and their parents are expected to answer for autism, in part by subjecting themselves to public scrutiny and correction (via treatments, reprimands, subjection to medical evaluation).

Autistic people and their parents are expected to answer in very different ways, however. Jack shows that parents (very often mothers) of autistic children have been expected to either submit to accusations of being the cause of their child’s ‘condition’ or to the demand that they take whatever measure they can to ‘fix’ their child so that they may be drawn into the normative social order of their communities. On the other hand, McGuire shows that autistic individuals, those understood to embody the character of the advocated for, are either understood to be incapable of communicating on their own behalf, or they are made to answer for autism with their lives (through disenfranchisement, continual inspection and often times unwanted treatment from biomedical practitioners, and death).

Critically, the value of autistic lives, and especially those understood to be “low functioning” or “severely” autistic people, is reasoned to have been foreclosed upon because of autism, rather than because of culturally accepted notions of autism as an unyielding terror that dissolves whatever potential meaning non-autistic lives are already assumed to hold in full measure. Yergeau conceives of the autism spectrum as a “demi-rhetorical construct” (32). She writes that

Autistic individuals ascribed a label of “low functioning are disqualified from rhetorical subjectivity because of their disability. But individuals deemed high functioning are likewise disqualified from rhetorical subjectivity —because their autism resides ... too far from the autism pole but not close enough to the normalcy pole. (48)

Therefore, the metaphor of the spectrum simultaneously oversimplifies autism and reinforces the clinical modes looking at neurodivergence to which we have been habituated. As McGuire explains, “this spectral conceptualization of autism ... functions as a way to further classify, and so further pathologize, the minutia of autistic difference” (51). Crucially, such measured scrutinization of autistic people’s bodies and minds, McGuire offers, has allowed for the emergence of the autistic body as “some ‘thing’” to be worked on, modified, and improved (10). The advocate is thus situated to be central in making that improvement happen.

### ***Normalizing anti-autistic violence against racialized bodies***

In *Authoring Autism*, Yergeau highlights that the high level of tolerance for violence against autistics is especially trenchant for those who occupy multiple and cross-cutting positions of marginality. Not only are children of color more likely to be “diagnosed far older and in much smaller proportions, when compared with white children,” they are more likely to be misdiagnosed (157). “These misdiagnoses, she explains, delay the age at which autistic children (and adults) of color receive necessary services” (157). Furthermore, because of the ways in which black and brown bodies are framed and read in the popular imagination, as violent, deviant, and degenerate, “neurodivergent diagnoses, including autism, are operationalized as weapons of voluntariness and willfulness when applied to children of color” (Yergeau 157). This contrasts with the presumed involuntarity or haplessness of autism in white “bodyminds” (Yergeau 157). In school settings with zero-tolerance policies, black and brown children are exposed to “systemic violence” by school disciplinary institutions and local law enforcement (157).

Looking at autism and race from another vantage point, McGuire identifies the aggressive rhetoric of warring against autism, that emerged from the “militaristic turn” in autism advocacy, with racist anti-Muslim orientations that abide in the notion of the war on terror (146). The terrorist is racialized and disabled, captured in the image of one who “possesses (is possessed by?) a pathological biomedical impairment” and is merely part and parcel of “the collective (psycho)pathology” of Muslim people (McGuire 178). We might further this connection, extending to other “war on” agendas that have framed racialized bodies in terms of a diabolical and defective infiltrating force. For example, in US immigration discourse on Latino immigration such harmful characterizations persist (Chavez; Baynton). Additionally, the war on drugs has hinged on framings of a coming/present terror that is frequently and predominantly understood to be embodied by black and brown people, especially those who are living in poverty and are driven by their supposed shared psychopathology (Ware, et al.). These explications of how race and autism interface underscore the unique forms of violence that are generated through the deployment of existing tropes of blackness or brownness and psychiatric or neurodevelopmental disability. Furthermore, they show how racialization transforms modes of perceiving disability and elicits the telling of alternative narratives, not of haplessness but of voluntary unruliness. Ultimately, however, such perceived unruliness, whether voluntary or not, is framed as pathological and thus requiring correction.

### **Making and Playing Allistic Characters in Autism Discourse**

In charting out some of the primary characters or roles that rhetors deploy and embody in autism discourse, Jack shows that in this discursive field, culturally sanctioned gender roles have danced along with accepted characterizations of autism. Importantly, in tracing out how this interplay worked across the history of the classification, she draws into view the modes of subjection or symbolic violence that women with autistic children experienced. In particular, Jack demonstrates that early in autism’s history, these mothers were held under the watchful, paternalistic eyes of their husbands, community members, and medical scientists and practitioners. They stood accused of being the causative factor in their children’s autism. The notion of the “refrigerator mother,” for example, linked most notably to Bruno Bettelheim’s studies, defines autism as an undesirable psychological anomaly that is caused by cold, unloving mothers. Jack explains:

While the fathers in question are sometimes also read as anxious or emotionally volatile, those features are read as more significant in the mother, perhaps because of a longstanding history portraying women as psychologically vulnerable. Emotional instability and anxiety become “interpretive topoi” that Bettelheim uses to characterize the mothers in his study. (36)

Yet, mothers of autistic children have resisted such characters and characterizations. The textual narratives that Jack explored reveal a critical reframing of the role of the autism mother. In sync with alternative, non-psychological theories of autism that posited a biological or pathogenic basis for autism, there emerged autism parent narratives that defined the autism mother as mother warrior in her quest to at whatever cost, pull their “lost” children out of autism’s thievish hands, restore them as much as possible to normalcy, and declare victory in their battle against that *thing* called autism, a supposedly insidious, community and family compromising neuro-social threat. What we might glean from Jack’s explication of autism parent narratives and the gendered character that they embodied in producing their narratives is that in the process of “beating” autism, there is also the promise of the parents’ own senses of redemption. This rings true for autism fathers as well. Jack suggests that the fix-it-father character is embodied by one who rejects characterizations of the deadbeat or disinterested autism dad by textually relaying their unique “connections to their children, the effects on their marriages of raising a special needs child, and ultimately the transformations those experiences create in the fathers’ own characters” (157).

The above explication from Jack plays well with the advocate and advocated for roles or characters that McGuire explicates. As in Jack’s text, cultural and institutional narratives of autism feed into the ways individuals participate in autism discourse. With the widespread rhetoric of an autism epidemic and extant notions of devalued disabled lives, all allistic (i.e., non-autistic) people, not just parents, medical scientists, and physicians, are expected to fiercely rebut the supposed autism threat. With open declarations of a war on autism, constituted by presidential proclamations, federal programs, major private research endeavors, and major autism advocacy campaigns, non-autistic persons are now entreated to participate in efforts to eviscerate autism. McGuire writes that the

figure of the (always and already non-autistic) advocate ... has shifted from the shape of a neutral witness charged with the task of helping to spread the word about autism’s criminalized deeds, to an invested victim who *has no choice but to protect and defend* against this figure, and now finally to a ... militant warrior who not only reactively defends and protects but who actively and even pre-emptively engages in battle. (158)

In examining media coverage of murders of autistic people, McGuire explains that autism itself is made responsible for the violence that autistic people have faced. Specifically, the ways that we talk about autism set up an important problem. Autism is framed as 1) a thing that must be separate from a person (how else can we humanely defeat it?) and 2) a thing that holds the power to dissolve a person’s humanness or worthiness when it becomes attached to them. Furthermore, as Yergeau demonstrates, this supposed degradation is at least in part related to understandings of autism as a thing that indicates “rhetorical involuntariness” (10). Autism is at the helm: it drives the autistic person’s actions and possesses greater agency or power than they do. This framing cultivates strident anxieties that sponsor the kinds of momentum needed to defeat the threat that autism is assumed to pose. But what McGuire shows is that in talking about defeating autism, waging war against it, the value of autistic lives is put up for debate. McGuire skillfully attends to this matter in her text, identifying person-first language as a key issue.

Person-first language in autism discourse preserves the view that autism is not a way of being, it is a pathological “thing” that has detracted from the wholeness of the autistic person by latching onto them (McGuire 190). McGuire relays the accounts of several recent murders of autistic children by parents who claimed to be at their wits end, not with their children but with autism. She notes that “autism was articulated as the target of—and the underlying reason for—violence” (202). The murders, of course, were understood to be atrocious. And yet, they were framed to be, in some ways, just unavoidable. Autism gets framed as a terrifying villain, with the posthumous narrative identifying the moment of diagnosis as the true moment of the child’s undoing. “[A]utism was understood in these stories of violence along the dominant lines of a culture ‘against’ autism,” McGuire writes, “a culture that commits itself, over and over again, to the belief that autism is some pathological condition of life ... that, in the name of life, must be fixed, cured, eliminated, lessened” (208). So, autism—particularly so-called “severe” autism—stands accused of being a primary death knell that can evacuate an autistic person of having a life worth living. In her discussion of the deaths of Jason Dawes, Scarlett Chen, and Katie McCarron, McGuire notes, “Autism was implicitly understood . . . as the beginning of the end of the lives of the three children: the impetus for violence and the underlying reason for the [murder] trials” (210).

## **Making and Playing Autistic Characters in Autism Discourse**

In her text, Jack offers a fascinating history of the rise of the “Aspie computer geek” character. Beginning with surging technology in neurogenetics and government-backed agendas to expand brain research endeavors, the incorporation of the Asperger’s Syndrome classification into the DSM-IV category of pervasive developmental disorders, and scholarly musings about the rise of the internet and “cognitive capitalism” (Jack 111), Jack draws out

a complex web of connections between widespread conceptions and representations of autistic sociality, gender, and the autistic brain. In doing so, she explicates how the work of developing a theory of autism has involved using standardized characters, like the Aspie computer geek, “to represent a cultural moment” (224). Importantly, the Aspie computer geek character is understood to be male, very tech savvy, and socially awkward. Due to shifts toward the “knowledge economy”, those who embodied this “high functioning” autistic character was essentially redeemed because the technological savvy of the aspie “knowledge worker” could be made useful to the new so-called “knowledge economy,” and their perceived awkward modes of social engagement and hyperfocus could thus be managed within neoliberal biopolitics (Jack 109).

As noted above in the brief discussion of autism and neoliberalism, placing these two concepts into conversation with one another reveals how idealized modes of moving through space and time are naturalized through the standardization of the human development. In *Authoring Autism*, Yergeau refers to McGuire's notion of “developmentalism,” which has limited the scope of autism discourse to autistic children and “presumes rhetorical incapacity of people who are designated ‘childlike’” because of they are autistic (Yergeau 155).

The interaction between the autistic subject and neoliberalism is also a concern for McGuire, who describes the out-of-sync autistic in her exploration of the temporality of neoliberalism in relation to autism advocacy campaigns and human development discourse on autism. In particular, autism is understood to represent “‘too slow’ development” (McGuire 104), even as it is also framed in major autism advocacy campaigns as a rapidly growing terror: “The speed at which autism is happening is underscored by numerical measurements of its prevalence” (McGuire 104). For McGuire, this neoliberal time speaks to both “a historical moment ... an economic system ... and as a tempo—a political rationality that manages the movement of bodies in time” (McGuire 105). But because the autistic person is always already out of sync, they cannot be effectively managed and are therefore a threat to the accepted social and economic order of things.

In Yergeau's text, the autistic or neuroqueer subject is also perpetually out of sync—developing at a supposedly delayed rate; moving through the world in inscrutable ways; exhibiting a sociality that does not satisfy non-autistics; potentially being already out of time for redemption. Crucially, being out of step with the idealized tempo situates autistic individuals under the surveillance of parents, physicians, employers, policymakers, and educators, who conceive of autistic bodies as perpetually requiring intervention by allistic others. Yergeau writes that “regardless of degree, low-functioning and high-functioning bodies are effectually nonfunctioning bodies,” such that “no autistic person is ever high functioning enough, much like no autistic person is ever low-functioning enough” (50).

### ***What's queer about neuroqueer?***

In *Authoring Autism*, Yergeau explores the autistic rhetor through the notion of neurological queerness. Drawing on queer studies scholars José Esteban Muñoz and Jonathan Alexander, she explains that “autistic stories are, at root, queer stories,” for they disrupt efforts to be assigned fixed definition and drawn under the disciplining hand of culturally sanctioned modes of reading and being read (18). “To be autistic, she writes, is to be neuroqueer, and to be neuroqueer is to be idealizing, desiring, sidling” (18). The neuroqueer subject refuses to land or be wrangled and is always becoming, emerging, and remaining “unoriented toward all that is normative and proper, whether empathy or eros or gender (performance and concept unto itself)” (27). This notion of being neurologically unoriented to the normative speaks to Jack's explication of the apparent tension between the autistic individual's self-concept, particularly along gender lines, and their engagements with culturally sanctioned, gendered characters. Jack highlights the text-based narratives of autistic people, illustrating that for many autistic people, gender might be something to tinker with or invent. For some, she asserts, gender is mutable and unfixed. In her explication, we see that there is a call for the expansion of “the range of gendered characters,” to

denaturalize models of gender that might, in some cases be better termed neurotypical models, since they sometimes presume an innate ability to decode and model an appropriate gendered character or, on the contrary, celebrate conscious acts of resistance to normalizing models. (Jack 202)

The work of “inventing gender” as “neurodiverse characters,” Jack explains, reveals something critical about our current understandings of not only gender and sexuality in the autistic lived experience, but also gender and sexuality writ large. In particular, incorporating hegemonic gender roles may involve complex neurological systems that allow for comprehension, repetition, and positive identification with established gendered roles and characters that are in circulation. She writes that autistic writers' understandings of gender “signify ... that gender is a socio-rhetorical system into which individuals are drawn, but not without some neurological orientation (whether innate or acquired)” (191). Consequently, Jack suggests, “Individuals with autism may not recognize gender in the first place or may learn to do so later in life” (191). In putting Jack and Yergeau into conversation, then, the potency of a concept like

neuroqueer is evident. As a rhetorical site of both being and becoming it “recoup[s] the logics of symptoms and transforms them into logics of (non)practice” (Yergeau 92), for “To be neuroqueer is to strive toward the becoming of being neuroqueer. Autistics never arrive” (Yergeau 93).

The texts discussed in this essay provide powerful methodological and theoretical interventions that offer a more expansive engagement with forms of narrative, violence, and gender in their cross-cutting relations with autism. Jack, McGuire, and Yergeau each put forward fresh and productive guide maps to how we might incorporate tools of rhetoric studies into the research questions we endeavor to make sense of in and outside of autism studies. Given that few studies are available that explore autism as a “constellation of stories” (autistic and non-autistic), the intersection of autism and gender, and the ways in which violence against autistic people is normalized through rhetorical framings of being at war, these texts make valuable contributions (Yergeau 20). Because of their focus on rhetoric and Westernized conceptions of autism, these books will be useful across disciplinary boundaries.

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