



Autism and Gender: From Refrigerator Mothers to Computer Geeks

Jordynn Jack

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The reasons behind the increase in autism diagnoses have become hotly contested in the media as well as within the medical, scholarly, and autistic communities. Jordynn Jack suggests the proliferating number of discussions point to autism as a rhetorical phenomenon that engenders attempts to persuade through arguments, appeals to emotions, and representational strategies. In *Autism and Gender: From Refrigerator Mothers to Computer Geeks*, Jack focuses on the ways gender influences popular discussion and understanding of autism's causes and effects. She identifies gendered theories like the refrigerator mother theory, for example, which blames emotionally distant mothers for autism, and the extreme male brain theory, which links autism to the modes of systematic thinking found in male computer geeks. Jack's analysis reveals how people employ such highly gendered theories to craft rhetorical narratives around stock characters--fix-it dads, heroic mother warriors rescuing children from autism--that advocate for ends beyond the story itself while also allowing the storyteller to gain authority, understand the disorder, and take part in debates. *Autism and Gender* reveals the ways we build narratives around controversial topics while offering new insights into the ways rhetorical inquiry can and does contribute to conversations about gender and disability.

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