

# Ought: The Journal of Autistic Culture

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Volume 5 | Issue 1

Article 2

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December 2023

## Note from the Editors: Critical Autism Studies

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### Recommended Citation

Rozema, Robert (2023) "Note from the Editors: Critical Autism Studies," *Ought: The Journal of Autistic Culture*: Vol. 5: Iss. 1, Article 2.

DOI: [10.9707/2833-1508.1151](https://doi.org/10.9707/2833-1508.1151)

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/ought/vol5/iss1/2>

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# Note from the Editors: Critical Autism Studies

The first chapter to catch my attention in the new *International Handbook of Critical Autism Studies Handbook* (Routledge, 2022) was “Critical Autism Parenting” by Mitzi Waltz, who like me, is a neurotypical academic with an autistic child (p. 195). Waltz, in her eloquent historical overview, details how parents of autistic individuals have shaped the way autism is publicly perceived, treated at home and in school, subjected to research, and most critically, commodified in our neoliberal society. Parents have been willing to pay whatever it takes, to “prevent their autistic child from becoming an autistic adult” (pp. 200-201), Waltz suggests, not without empathy for parents facing the crush of normalizing social pressures. But the essay ends with forceful recommendations for the same: stop shopping for solutions, stop fighting for individuals alone, and start working toward collective solutions with larger affiliate groups of professionals, autistic people, and their family and friends.

In the first five years of its existence, this journal has attempted to heed Waltz’ call by working for the collective good of the autistic community. It has carved out a very small niche in the larger field of Critical Autism Studies (CAS throughout this issue), striving to achieve what Damion Milton and Sarah Ryan, in their introduction to the handbook, describe as a central concern of critical autism studies—namely, “creating a space to relieve some of the tensions that percolate around autism and autism research, enabling respectful, open dialogue and discussion” (p.4). In this issue, then, *Ought* explores these percolating tensions surrounding the emergent discipline of CAS, seeking to contribute to the conversation with both scholarly and creative works.

The issue begins with a broad overview CAS by one of its most notable scholars, Sonya Loftis, whose own major monograph, *Imagining Autism: Fictions and Stereotypes on the Spectrum* (2015) is a key work in the study of autistic representation. Loftis accounts for many of the seminal books in the field, scholarly texts that helped to establish the framework for what became CAS. Cansu Elmadagli examines how CAS intersects with several additional academic fields, including critical discourse analysis, feminist theory, and

post-colonialism. Catherine Caldwell-Harris and Anna Schwartz posit a new understanding of autistic sociality, reviewing relevant research while advancing a strengths-based perspective on this subject.

Because CAS has always embraced popular culture outside of the academy, Loftis' article is supplemented by Alyssa Hillary Zisk's annotated bibliography of non-academic web articles and blog posts that, in their words, "take defining actions of critical autism or neurodiversity studies." One defining action of CAS is the relentless interrogation of autistic representation in its many manifestations. *Sharp Stick*, a recent film by Lena Durham, features an autistically coded character, who is—yet again—played by a neurotypical actor. Autistic critic Meaghan Krazinski criticizes this representation from multiple theoretical viewpoints, arguing that the film, for its faults, invites viewers "to critically examine societal expectations, representations of neurodivergence."

This issue is well-supplemented with artwork by Pernille Fraser, and Shelly Wallace, and poetry by Sarah Nuttall. Their contributions suggest that the field of CAS must also include original creative and critical works by autistic individuals, paintings and poems that express how, in Nuttall's language, "we have all been/ we are all/ differences/ differently/ wired."

—Robert Rozema

## References

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