



Neurodivergent Wellness

**As Quality of Life, Community, and
Autonomy in Academic Libraries**

Preamble

- C-PTSD, Autism, and likely several undiagnosed learning disabilities
- Neurodiversity is bigger than trauma, Autism, and ADHD, but these positions tend to be the best represented
- Trigger Warnings: Abelism, Nazis, eugenics, suicide



What is Neurodiversity?

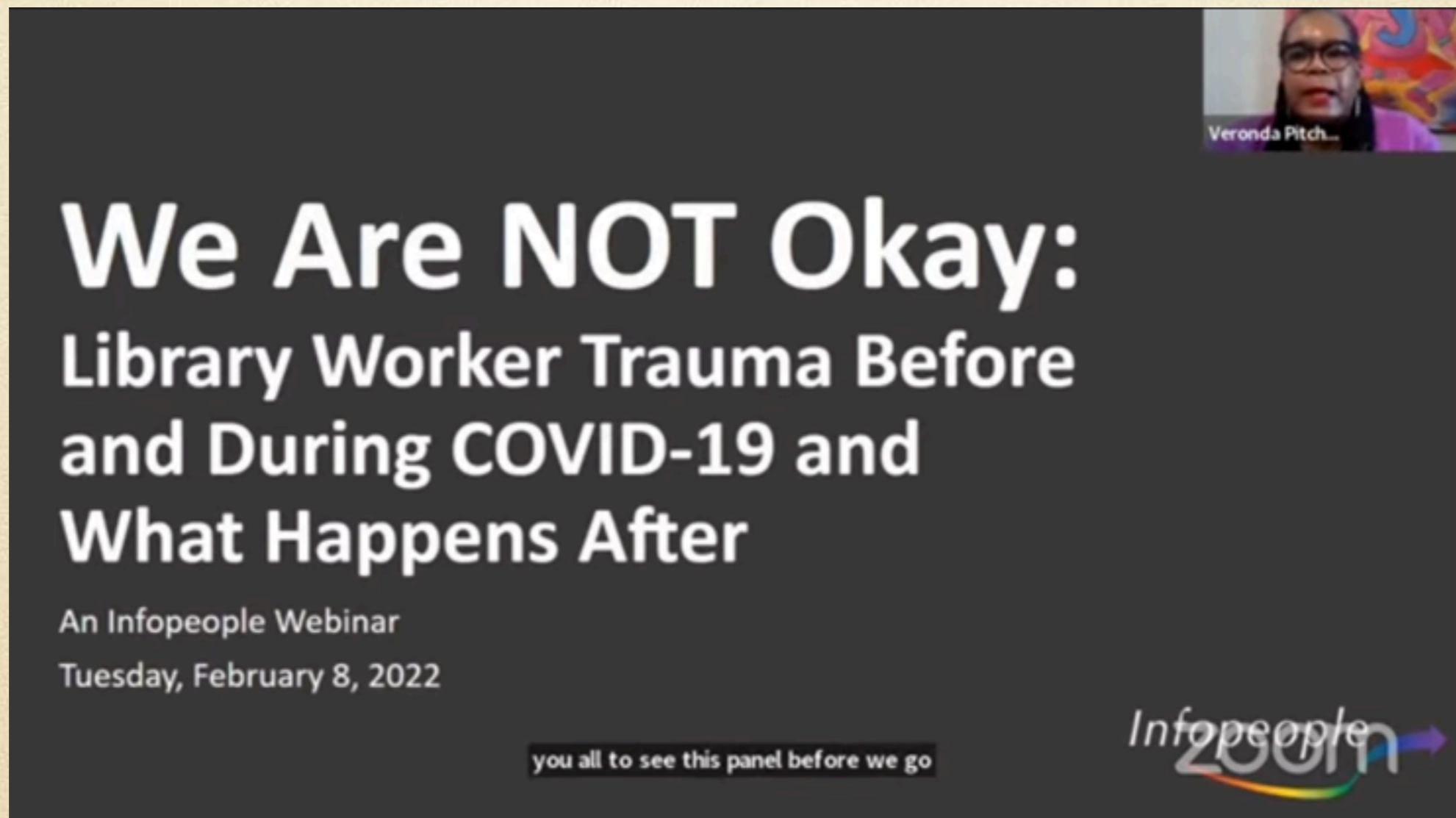
The term neurodiversity was introduced in a 1998 undergraduate honours thesis by Australian sociologist **Judy Singer**.

Just as biodiversity is a measure of ecological richness, neurodiversity reflects the range of ways brains and nervous systems can differ from person to person and the cultural and social meaning we give to such differences.

Someone whose neurological arrangement differs from the average is **neurodivergent**.

A person can be born neurodivergent, or become so later in life through illness or accident.

Emergent Neurodivergence



We Are NOT Okay:
Library Worker Trauma Before
and During COVID-19 and
What Happens After

An Infopeople Webinar
Tuesday, February 8, 2022

you all to see this panel before we go

Veronda Pitch...

Infopeople
zoom

The image shows a Zoom meeting window. The main area is a dark grey title slide with white text. In the top right corner, there is a small video feed of a woman with glasses and a purple top, identified as 'Veronda Pitch...'. At the bottom center, there is a black text box with white text that reads 'you all to see this panel before we go'. In the bottom right corner, there are logos for 'Infopeople' and 'zoom'.

The Social Model of Disability

“The social model of disability distinguishes between the core *impairments* inherent to medicalized conditions and *disability* caused by societal barriers (e.g. lack of assistive technology and physical infrastructure to enable someone with a mobility disability to move where they want to go), which for autism especially include social norms that result in misunderstandings and mistreatment.

[...]

One of the social model originators Mike Oliver explained that he never advocated it as all-encompassing or intended it to *replace* the individual (medical) model, but to serve as an academic-political tool to help empower disabled people by emphasizing attention to the social obstacles that unite us”

~Steven Kapp, “Introduction,” in *Autistic Community and the Neurodiversity Movement: Stories from the Frontline*, 7.

The Neurodiversity Movement

- “[T]he neurodiversity movement begins with its goal of **quality of life**, which includes but surpasses adaptive functioning (e.g. **self-determination and rights, well-being, social relationships and inclusion, and personal development**) [...], and works backward from there to address the individual *and* social factors that *interact* to produce disability.
- S.K. Kapp, “Introduction,” 7

Wellness is Political and Communal

- Modern work is injuring and disabling: “accidents,” professionalism, interviews, and precarity
- Precarity is antithetical to self-determination, well-being, social relationships and inclusion, and personal development
- If you’re not looking into the political dimensions of neurodiversity, you’re not really understanding what your neurodivergent students and colleagues are experiencing on a daily basis. The world in which we live
- So here’s some context...



Autistic Unemployment

- We were precarious before it was cool
- “Autistics, like most disabled people, are unemployed and underemployed at far higher rates than the neurotypical population [70-90%]. Even those of us who can mask and present as “professional” occupy a very perilous spot. One awkward moment or verbal misstep at work can get us fired, particularly if we are visibly disabled or already out about our neurodiverse status. Autistic job seekers struggle to find work, because job interviews are ambiguous, high-stress performance situations. Interview questions are rarely provided in advance, and job seekers are expected to provide socially acceptable responses and reactions without appearing to “try too hard” to do so.”
- Devon Price, *Unmasking Autism*, 361

Discovering the New Faces
of Neurodiversity

UNMASKING AUTISM

Devon Price, PHD

author of LAZINESS DOES NOT EXIST

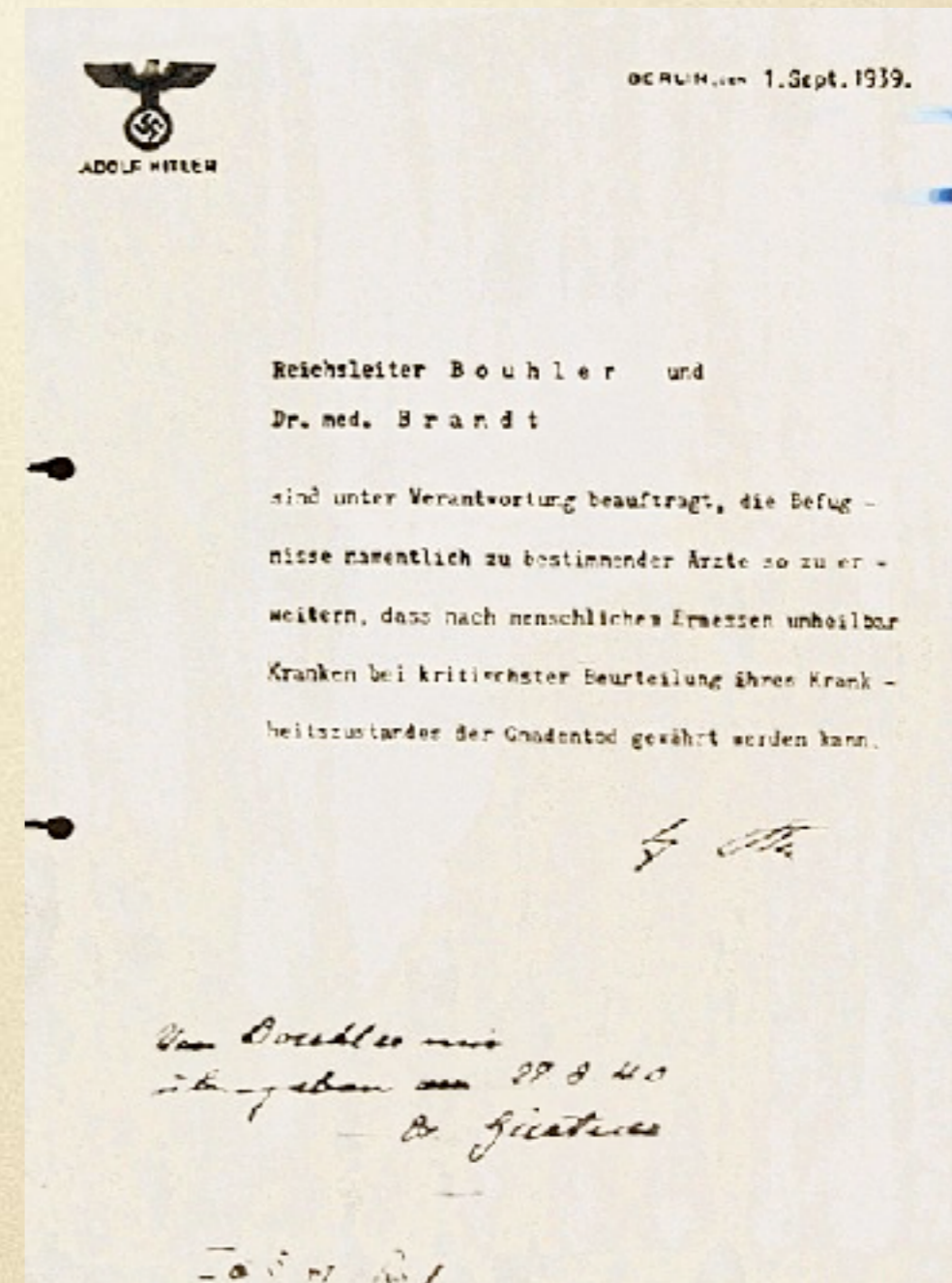
The Rudolph Effect



deviation
from the norm
will be punished
unless it is
exploitable

Disability and Society

- “Don’t mind them”
- Hans Asperger (1906-1980) and Aktion T4 (1939)
- In the developing context of MAiD in Canada, Neoliberal eugenics is the illusion of choice and it is very much alive and well



Autism/ADHD as a “Super Power” and “The Model Minority Myth”

- “the stereotype of success among Asian Americans is used to blame another minority group for its struggles, thus perpetuating the deficit thinking model prevalent in education.”

~Poon, et al. “A critical review of the model minority myth in selected literature on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in higher education,” *Review of Educational Research*, 474–475.

Cognitive Marginalization and Epistemic Injustices

Who gets to speak for themselves?

Pathologizing of autism from the outside

- “Reduced empathy”
- “No theory of mind” vs. the “Double Empathy Problem”
- “Extreme male brain”



Can't Win for Loosing

- **“ASD individuals, unlike healthy control subjects, blurred the distinction between private and public conditions while making moral decisions.”**
- They exhibited “behavioral rigidity”
- **“These findings strongly indicate an atypical valuation of morally tainted personal profits and moral costs brought by benefiting a bad cause in autistic individuals. This probably led to their extremely high rejection rate for immoral offers. Our results fit the literature on moral judgment, which has shown that ASD individuals exhibit an excessive valuation of negative consequences when judging the moral appropriateness or permissibility of actions.”**
- Hu, *et al.* “Right temporoparietal junction underlies avoidance of moral transgression in Autism Spectrum Disorder,” in *Journal of Neuroscience* (2020).

Expertise is Political - Epistemic Injustices



Whose Expertise Is It? Evidence for Autistic Adults as Critical Autism Experts

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Autistic and non-autistic adults' agreement with scientific knowledge about autism, how they define autism, and their endorsement of stigmatizing conceptions of autism has not previously been examined. Using an online survey, we assessed autism knowledge and stigma among 636 adults with varied relationships to autism, including autistic people and nuclear family members. Autistic participants exhibited more scientifically based knowledge than others. They were more likely to describe autism experientially or as a neutral difference, and more often opposed the medical model. Autistic participants and family members reported lower stigma. Greater endorsement of the importance of normalizing autistic people was associated with heightened stigma. Findings suggest that autistic adults should be considered autism experts and involved as partners in autism research.

Are there more of us in libraries?



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Choosing the Right Job for People with Autism or Asperger's Syndrome

By: Temple Grandin, Ph.D. Assistant Professor Colorado State University Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA (November, 1999)

Jobs need to be chosen that make use of the strengths of people with autism or Asperger's syndrome. Both high and low functioning people have very poor short-term working memory, but they often have a better long-term memory than most normal people. I have great difficulty with tasks that put high demands on short-term working memory. I cannot handle multiple tasks at the same time. Table 1 is a list of BAD jobs that I would have great difficulty doing. Table 2 is a list of easy jobs for a visual thinker like me. I have

The State of the Field

Gerard Shea and Sebastian Derry,
“Academic Libraries and Autism
Spectrum Disorder: What Do We
Know?” *The Journal of Academic
Librarianship*.

- A solid survey of what literature does exist (it's not a lot)
- Offers some helpful suggestions for students
- Still leans towards the medical model even as its saying that librarians need to listen to autistic people more



Neurodiversity and Library Practice

(With apologies to the organizers of the OCULA conference)

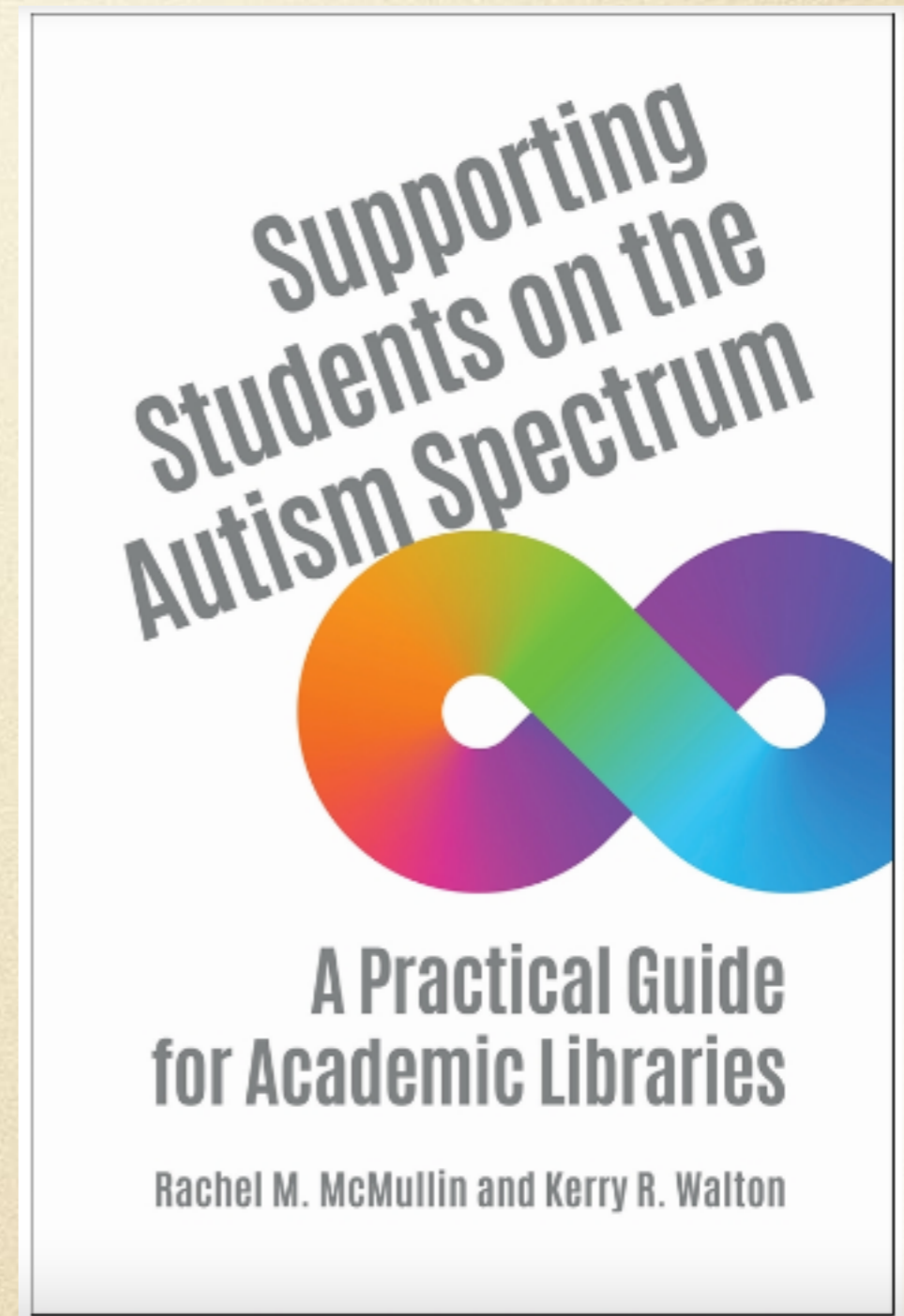
Maybe well intentioned.

BUT

Uses person first language, “with autism” and “high functioning autism” as defaults

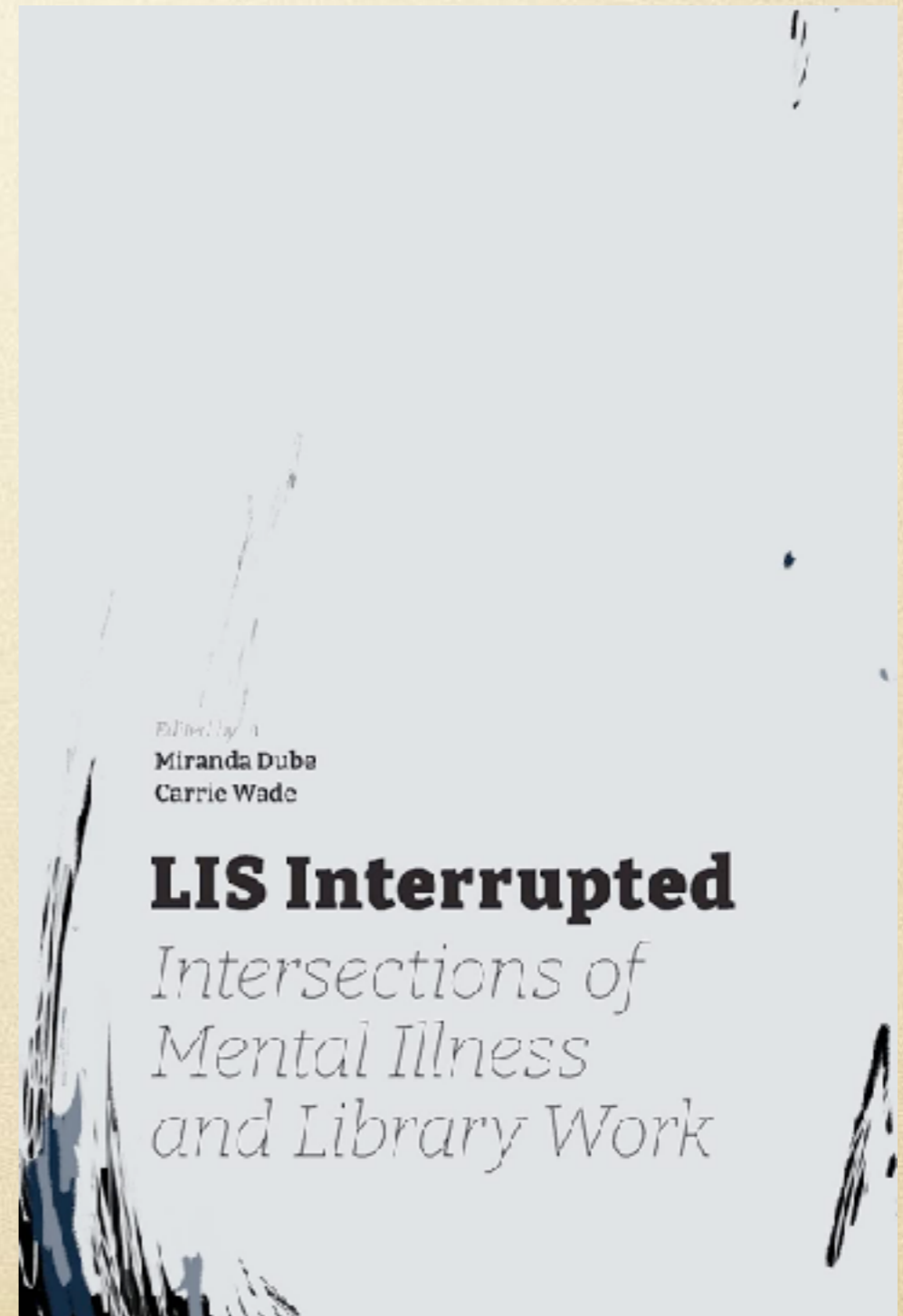
Says it’s not pathologizing, but focuses on the DSM-5 as its framing text and is profoundly othering in its language and analysis

Rachel M. McMullin and Kerry R. Walton,
Supporting Students on the Autism Spectrum: A Practical Guide for Academic Libraries, 2019.



Neurodiversity and Library Practice

Miranda Dube and
Carrie Wade. *LIS
Interrupted:
Intersections of Mental
Illness and Library
Work*. Sacramento:
Library Juice Press,
2021.



Neurodiversity and Library Practice

Emily Lawrence, “Loud Hands in the Library,” 2013.

(short, but helpful overview)

Alice Eng and Charlie Remy, “Neurodiversity in the Library: One Librarian’s Experience.,” *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, 2017.

(personal narrative and observation on how most LIS literature focuses on autistic patrons, particularly children)

Neurodiversity and Library Practice

Zachary Tumlin, “This is a Quiet Library, Except when It’s Not: on the Lack of Neurodiversity Awareness in Librarianship,” *Music Reference Services Quarterly*, 2019.

(Personal narrative on autism and music, literature review, and brief history)

Much More to Do

- We have to start with our own labour conditions if we want to have the power to really show up for our communities
- We need to have more meetings like last month's OCULA conference (virtual options)
- The politics of capitalist barriers to accessing information (e.g. executive dysfunction, paywalls, and multi-step authentication)
- How library worker representation matters to student outcomes
- How to make education more accessible to non-speaking autistics

© Reframing Autism, 2020



"I thrive when my needs are
understood and
recognised."

– Yenn Purkis, Autistic advocate, author and speaker

Sources

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Thank You Kindly

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