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Mom Blogging as Maternal Activism: How to Be an Ally for Autism Acceptance

The autism acceptance movement advocates for respect, support, and accommodations so that autistics can participate in public life. This article examines two blogs by mothers of autistic children as case studies of how to be an ally to autism acceptance. In the early 2000s, the authors of Squidalicious and diary of a mom blogged about their experiences as mothers of autistic children who came to be advocates for autism acceptance. Dominant narratives of autism often portray it as a medical tragedy, and mothers of autistics are cast as warriors seeking cures or as martyrs to unfulfilling caregiving. In contrast, these blogs portray autism as a form of neurodiversity that includes both strengths and challenges, such as difficulties that come from social and physical environments that do not accommodate autism. By blogging about the everyday ups and downs of their lives, these mothers engage in five clusters of activity that constitute their allying with the autism acceptance movement: advocating for inclusion and accommodations; personalizing autism through portraying family life; providing social support for parents, children, and autistic advocates; educating readers about autism acceptance; and showing their own change and learning. Examining these practices in this specific context yields insight into the potential and challenges of online maternal activism.

Mothers have always been deeply implicated in discourses about autism. From the “refrigerator mothers” who were blamed in the 1950s for causing autism to present-day celebrity moms touting cures, representations of autism are bound up with representations of mothers. Mothers have also played critical roles in the evolution of biomedical knowledge and in public advocacy. Today, mothers are visible in the dominant narrative of autism as a medical tragedy that should be treated and prevented. “Warrior moms” fight for a cure or oppose vaccinations. Some post videos of their children in meltdowns to generate sympathy, and high-profile charities promote these stories to create a sense of urgency for fundraising. News coverage of mothers who kill their autistic children too often implies that this otherwise unthinkable action is understandable if we presume that autism is a fate worse than death.

In contrast to the dominant narrative and the warrior, martyr, and murderer roles it allocates to mothers, I analyze two blogs that model how to be an ally mom in the movement for autism acceptance and self-advocacy. This movement seeks respect, support, and accommodations that enable autistics to participate in public life. Changing language and narratives is a central strategy. For example, both of the blogs I analyze refer to “autistics” rather than “children/adults with autism” to resist likening autism to a disease and to recognize neurology as a fundamental part of identity that can be a source of pride. My analysis of these two case studies provides insight into ally strategies in this particular movement and medium. It also prompts reflection about the larger issue of the sustainability of online maternal activism.

Autism Acceptance and Self-Advocacy

The dominant discourse in authoritative news sources and in nonprofits, such as Autism Speaks, represents autism as a tragedy to be cured or prevented. Autism is seen as a medical condition characterized by deficits and impairments in social communication and social interactions and by restricted, repetitive activities and interests. News coverage emphasizes symptoms, statistics, and treatments (Billawalla and Wolbring 5) and is more often negative than positive, portraying autistics as both vulnerable and dangerous as well as sources of suffering to their parents (Huws and Jones 101). Mainstream media turn for expertise to medical authorities, government officials, family members, and nonprofits and seldom quote autistics (McKeever 228). These representations align with funding priorities. In the US, for example, more resources go to research on cause and cure than to support and accommodations for adults (Office of Autism Research Coordination 22-23).

A competing discourse redefines autism as a form of neurodiversity that entails strengths as well as impairments that need acceptance and accommodation rather than a cure. Neurological differences are seen as “natural, healthy, and valuable forms of human diversity” similar to race, culture, gender, or sexual orientation (Walker 156). Advocates do not deny autism is a disability, but they focus on addressing difficulties that arise from a society that fails to respect and accommodate autistics. Advocates seek a public voice and a shift in attention from searching for a cure to providing supports that mitigate challenges and enable participation in society.

Online interaction is key to the autism acceptance movement (Davidson 208). Geographically separated individuals find common cause and coordinate offline meetings. Internet advocacy challenges stereotypes by demonstrating autistics speaking for themselves, forming relationships, and asserting expertise and identity. Some advocates frame their mission in terms of struggles for expertise and representation through counternarratives (Broderick and Ne'eman 470) and use online communication to disseminate their stories.

Mothers of autistic children are active online, but their alliances are varied. Jessica Hughes has documented rifts between autistic advocates and neurotypical (NT) parents who post online. NT parents who seek treatments or wonder about causes have been criticized for failing to accept neurodiversity. Some NT parents' vivid descriptions of autistic children engaging in self-harm or meltdowns have been accused of violating the child's privacy and contributing to negative stereotypes. Debates are also waged about the centrality of NT parent voices and whether they or adult autistics should speak for and about the interests of autistic children (Hughes 130-89).

Calls to overcome these divisions have come from all sides. For example, the editors of the autism acceptance website *Thinking Person's Guide to Autism* (*TPGA*) state that "[B]eing a parent of a disabled child is not the same as having a disability, and we need to figure out how we can have productive conversations about that disconnect—especially when it affects our ability to work toward common goals" (Rosa, "The Self Advocate/Parent Dialogues"). As autistic advocate Kassaine S. of the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network explains: "We are fighting an uphill battle against a strong power gradient. Allies can use their privilege to lend legitimacy and to somewhat relieve the power imbalance. And allies can lead the way in us being treated as equal by showing everyone else how it is done" ("What Is an Ally?").

The ally role is an important way for NT mothers to participate in the autism acceptance movement. An ally is a member of a majority group who rejects the dominant ideology and works for and with an oppressed group. The ally role is complex. Sometimes it calls for outspoken action, whereas at other times, it is appropriate to listen as members of the oppressed group speak and act. Ally status is less convincing as a self-proclaimed title than when members of the oppressed group ascribe it based on actions. Some autistic advocates emphasize that allies need to make room for autistic voices rather than their own NT voices (Brown; Schaber).

Mom Blogs as Sites for Autism Acceptance Activism

Mom blogs are online sites where mothers post text and images that chronicle the everyday experience of mothering. Blogs are updated frequently, with posts appearing in reverse chronological order. Although some profit from advertising, most emphasize self-expression and community for a small audience (Morrison 38). Connection and interaction are central, including links to other blogs and online content, comments (which often display reciprocal reading among bloggers), and cross-promotion on other social media, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Mom blogs have garnered public scrutiny, fierce loyalty, and scholarly dissection. Press coverage has criticized bloggers for exploiting their children and for narcissistic attention to unsavory aspects of childcare (Hochman). In contrast, some feminist scholars say they are "radical feminist acts" that provide a realistic portrayal of everyday mothering and supplant expert advice with solidarity among mothers (Lopez). A blogger who interacts with reader response is engaged in "a constantly evolving negotiation" of the role of mother and of one's place in "Internet parenting cultures" (Hammond 84). The presence of lesser known voices from the margins also diversifies our image of who mothers are and how they mother (Friedman 359).

Blogs exemplify how new media technologies expand our options for personal, social, and political engagement while blurring boundaries among them. What starts as personal expression connects participants with like-minded others and with the larger society and polity (Papacharissi 129). These informal interactions can change cultural norms and "engender communities of expression with shared horizons of meaning" (McAfee 283), which, in turn, shapes citizen identities in ways that contribute to political choices. Noëlle McAfee urges us not to dismiss how new media engage users politically because these "ordinary discussions of informal publics that circulate throughout society structure our feelings, shape our identities, open up new worlds and possibilities, identify 'macrosocial problems' needing the attention of formal structures, and spur collective action" (275). This is especially important for understanding mothers who are engaged in autism activism. Users who are not already disability activists find interaction in online spaces a way to connect their story with the experiences of others and with policy issues (Trevisan 53, 57-58). Likewise, many maternal activists do not initially see advocacy on behalf of their children as "political" but do end up engaging in collective action as they "compare notes, confront authorities, and stand up for what they believe" (Panitsch 28).

How to Be an Ally Mom Blogger

Squidalicious and *diary of a mom* are blogs authored by NT mothers of autistic children and are case studies demonstrating what it can look like to be an ally to autism acceptance. Shannon Des Roches Rosa began writing *Squidalicious* in July 2003. The blog has led her to authoring books, facilitating online communities (including the *TPGA* blog), serving as a contributing editor on parenting at *BlogHer*, and engaging in offline activism. Her blog includes over 2,500 posts and has a high profile in the autism acceptance community. She has 12,800 Twitter followers, and the TPGA Facebook community includes over 200,000 followers. Jess Wilson started *a diary of a mom* in March 2008 with posts about her family, including her autistic daughter, Brooke. Jess is a widely read voice for autism acceptance who engages in advocacy both offline and online (on her blog, in a Facebook group, at *Huffington Post*, and within an online community support page). The Facebook page associated with the blog has over 313,000 followers, and the Twitter account has nearly five thousand.

Madeline Peters et al. have described the practices of allies to the disability rights movement, including individual practices (e.g., seeking opinions from people with disabilities and accepting a person as more than their disability), institutional practices (e.g., discovering the essential functions people with disabilities can perform and scheduling activities with disabilities in mind), and cultural practices (e.g., assuming people with disabilities live full and complex lives and considering how language reflects how we see one another) (532-34). I compared their list with posts from these two blogs to generate five clusters of activity that constitute allying with the autism acceptance movement: advocating, personalizing, supporting, educating, and learning. Examining these practices in this specific context yields insight into the potential and challenges of maternal activism online.

Advocating

Rosa and Wilson both do work that is easily recognizable as advocacy to facilitate inclusion, services, and accommodations, including the following activities: fundraising, speaking engagements, lobbying, campaigning for politicians who support the cause, criticizing media coverage, submitting comments to government agencies and hearings, meeting with White House staff, participating in vaccine-promotion campaigns, registering complaints against organizations that discriminate against autistics, and participating in school programs. Their blogs report offline advocacy and encourage readers to act. For example, Rosa described overcoming her reluctance to meet with her congressional representative in person. She provided a list of talking points for readers and told them, “If I can do it, you can, too!” Wilson alerted her readers that the Massachusetts Autism Commission lacked an autistic representative and told readers how to register a complaint with the Commission. Advocacy that takes place in other online spaces is linked on the blog (e.g., a list of Rosa’s recent speaking engagements with links to texts, videos, and podcasts). Plenty of advocacy also takes place on the blogs. For instance, Rosa periodically solicits funds for autism-related causes (e.g., an all-abilities playground, an autism centre, and an autism-friendly camp), and she participates in a yearly campaign in which social media likes, comments, and shares tagged “#Blogust” produce funding for free vaccines.

Blogging gives their advocacy a distinctive character and potential, “harness[ing] the energy and the synergy of the blogosphere for a whole lot of good” (Rosa, “Projecting”). Persuasive appeals reach a worldwide audience. Embedding advocacy in narrative gives poignancy to the appeal, and reader comments express feeling personally connected to the bloggers and, by extension, their issues. Fundraising and organizing utilize crowdsourcing, with readers passing information on to their own social networks. Stories about bloggers’ advocacy help readers envision what it would be like to engage in advocacy themselves.

An example from Wilson’s blog exemplifies these processes. In March 2011, Wilson posted a letter to then President Obama. A year later, she was invited to the White House to attend an autism event that brought together parents, advocates, teachers, and other stakeholders to meet with staff from federal agencies to identify policies and facilitate interagency coordination. Wilson posted about the speakers she heard, the policy discussions, and her own experiences (including her transformation from “just a mom” to “parent advocate”). At that meeting, Wilson met an assistant to the president, who invited her to a private White House meeting in May 2012. Before the visit, Wilson posted, “What do you want him to know?” The eighty-eight responses generated a list for Wilson and functioned as a virtual town hall in which readers responded to one another’s arguments for policies, including mandating insurance coverage, improving support for families, shifting the focus of funded research, and improving educational programs and funding. Wilson’s blog and the community that formed around it launched her into the role of public advocate, and her detailed reporting brought her readers along. They were represented and informed, and their comments indicated that, independent of any effects on policymakers, they were galvanized to work in their own communities.

Personalizing

Another kind of activism involved personalizing autism through stories of daily life. The journal format is especially conducive to this. As Wilson explained: “Tell your stories, demystify autism, pull back the curtain to reveal the amazing people behind it” (Wilson, “our autism”). Photos accompanying stories are compelling: Children are shown engaging with other family members and in ordinary settings at home and in the world. The posts give a face to “autism, and that face contests a narrative of autism as deficit or tragedy. Nearly every post on these blogs personalizes, but the following two serve as exemplars.

“Happy 12th Birthday, Leo!” opened with a photo of Rosa’s son “at about the time he was given a diagnosis of Extreme Cuteness.” Readers will recognize the juxtaposition of this diagnosis with Leo's autism diagnosis—a contrast Rosa acknowledged later in the post as she marveled at how Leo "continues to defy the klaxons of doom that so many experts set off around him when the first photo was taken, who continues to grow and mature and gain skills and… need us less (*sniff*)." The post described Leo's birthday plans (cupcakes in class, dinner at his favorite restaurant, a movie, and bouncy-house with friends) as well as examples of his growing independence. Photos showed an attractive child in ordinary settings, gazing into the camera with a mischievous smile. The post resembled a type common in mom blogs, in which a child's birthday prompts reflection on how much and how quickly he has grown.

Wilson explicitly takes up the goal of personalizing autism in her post, "not just numbers, people." She gave links to recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) statistics on the prevalence of autism and then described her weariness at talking about statistics. She stated: "Autism is one word… but there is no one autism." A photo showed her daughter in a pink "Skating Club" sweatshirt, smiling and looking attentively at something in the distance. Beneath the photo, Wilson said, "There's going to be a lot of talk about the data today. And it matters. But what matters more is that for every number—for every data point and every statistic—there is a face. And behind that face a life. And behind that life the lives of those who love them. Not just numbers. PEOPLE." Even in posts that do not explicitly state the goal, these blogs personalize autism by showing faces and describing the daily lives of autistics and their families.

Supporting

Support for parents is frequently given through information and affirmation in posts and also in reader comments that reciprocate support for the author and one another. Comments underscore the value of this support for parents who feel isolated or, at the very least, out of step with their peers. Said one, "There are so many people in my life with NT kids who just DON'T understand what I go through, and I find online people who do." Another added, "I have sent SO many people your blog URL who have children with autism because they need to hear and see that there is hope" (Rosa, "For New Autism Parents").

Support was the explicit purpose in a post Wilson titled "dear you." She stated in all caps, "YOU ROCK" and then explained:

> I don't mean that you deserve a medal just for parenting your kid. That's what parents do. We parent. Our kids. So yay, for you cause you stuck around? Hell no. And I don't mean to imply that I'm offering sympathy because your path is different—and likely more difficult—than most. It is what it is. And I'm not much for sympathy. What I mean is that you rock because of the WAY that you parent your kid.

The post then listed ways of parenting that she admires—such as adjusting to accommodate children's needs, showing patience, seeing your child's victories and celebrating simple successes, refusing to define your child by their challenges, realizing your child is communicating even without words, teaching other children "that typical is an illusion and compassion is everything," looking out for one another and treating others' children as your own, listening to autistic adults so you can better understand your own child, and giving your child space to fail and to succeed. The post offered not only affirmation but also information about a way of parenting that is consistent with autism acceptance. In online conflicts between NT parents and autistic advocates, parents often justify posting detailed negative portrayals by saying that they need validation for their difficult lives. In contrast, Wilson's post shows a way of supporting parents without stigmatizing or demeaning descriptions of autistic children.

The blogs also model supporting autistic children while encouraging competence and independence. For example, Rosa addressed how parents' concerns for safety or efficiency may prevent children from opportunities to be independent. She described how offering Leo the chance to pour his own juice revealed that he was able to do it, "which I would have missed had I not slowed down and handed over the reins." The post celebrated Leo's new skill even though it did not correspond to typical developmental milestones: "I consider scenarios like this part of Autism Acceptance: being able to appreciate that it is totally fucking awesome for my nearly-twelve-year-old son to pour his own juice, without any bittersweet undertones. This is not denying Leo's reality or mine. This is understanding what autism means for Leo, and adjusting to his natural patterns of rhythm and growth." Reader comments affirmed this perspective, congratulated Leo, and supported Rosa ("Competence and Constant Vigilance").

Both blogs support autistic advocates by amplifying their expertise, modelling respectful engagement, and showing the value of learning from autistic adults. Over time, both blogs included more links to blogs written by autistic adults, who also showed up among the commenters. In "the courage to listen," Wilson used a mothering analogy to explain why parents should discontinue blogging or parenting practices that adult autistics identify as hurtful: Suppose she applied a sunburn spray that was advertised as soothing but made her daughter cry because it stung? Would a mother keep using the spray because her intention was to help or would she listen to her daughter and stop? Wilson compared this to NT parents dismissing concerns of autistic advocates. She acknowledged it is "crushing and frustrating and heartbreaking and yes, even angry-making" to have one's actions criticized but urged NT readers to be allies nonetheless: "If we keep allowing our egos to stand in the way of our ears, we'll just keep inadvertently hurting the very people whom we so desperately want to help." In addition to speaking as a mother, Wilson also linked to a post by an autistic advocate explaining this phenomenon from her perspective. Reader comments created a discussion among autistic adults, parents, and others about what is or is not experienced as helpful.

Educating

Both blogs educate about a variety of issues, such as revealing actions by others that stigmatize, addressing problematic language and modelling better alternatives, raising awareness of how ordinary events can be challenging, showing autistics' capabilities, and demonstrating how accommodations facilitate participation. Simply writing about their lives educated readers about "the beautiful, frustrating, complicated, messy, overwhelming story of autism" in order "to break down the walls, to find understanding and compassion and validation and celebration and support and community and all of the things I want so badly for my girl" (Wilson, "our autism"). Stories of personal experience told over time as children grow are invaluable for showing the diversity of autistic experience. Commenters on this post shared their own stories, both similar to and different from Wilson's, and agreed on the importance of complicating stereotypes and including all autistics.

Several posts detailed offline interactions. Recounting these interactions educated readers who might have similar reactions or questions. For example, Rosa described a conversation with a salesperson for vertical blinds who asked, "Is your son really that difficult?" after Rosa expressed concerns that Leo would "love them to pieces, quite literally." Rosa responded by explaining that Leo is not difficult but that "his autism means he sometimes *has difficulty* reining in his impulses…. He would likely see [the blinds], as he does in most doctors' offices, as more fun than any plaything on this planet. And he might pull them all down, in his enthusiasm. It's not that Leo is difficult—it's that I know what can be difficult for him." The salesperson "seemed to get it. She nodded, and said that what I told her made sense because 'we all make allowances for each other, especially as parents.'" The story taught readers about autism and about how to educate others ("Is Your Son").

Wilson taught about language and autistic capabilities in a post that juxtaposed negatively worded expert assessments with her daughter's activities. In response to "Child Presents with Significant Motor Planning Deficits—often appears to get physically *stuck*" Wilson wrote, "For the record, I abhor the word Deficits. Challenges? Yes. Lots of 'em. Deficits? Hell no." She described seeing girls doing cartwheels at recess: "Out there on the playground with them was the Child Who Presents with Significant Motor Planning Deficits. The one whose *skill acquisition is stymied by overwhelming anxiety.* The one who is so *daunted by the perceived inevitability of failure/frustration that she* *refuses to attempt new tasks.*" The post included video of Brooke doing cartwheels, with the caption "The one whose heart is twenty times bigger than her ~~deficits~~ challenges will ever be. Don't believe everything you read." The post showed readers the capabilities and perseverance of her autistic child as well as an alternative way of framing "deficits" as "challenges" instead ("doing cartwheels").

Rosa and Wilson expressed a sense of urgency to give to parents of newly diagnosed children the kind of information they wish they had received. In a post entitled, "For New Autism Parents: On Gratitude," Rosa wrote the following:

> I think a lot about the information and attitudes I'd have wanted to jack, Neuromancer-style, straight into my brain eight years ago so I could instantly be the parent Leo needed me to be…. There's often no substitute for experience constructed out of progressive, natural epiphanies. Still, that experience can be altered dramatically by external factors, like consistent exposure to positive attitudes and helpful perspectives…. So I'm going to dole out some perspective, *and* attitude.

The post struck a balance between acknowledging that some "parts are really damn hard" and feeling "grateful that this beautiful boy is my son." This post explicitly distilled lessons she had learned. In addition, her daily stories gave readers a vicarious experience of "progressive, natural epiphanies," which resulted in "consistent exposure" to a way of seeing autism through the lens of acceptance. Rosa also pursued this goal as a co-editor of *TPGA*. The site (and a book of the same title) are "the resource we wish we'd had when autism first became part of our lives: a one-stop source for carefully curated, evidence-based information from autism parents, autistics, and autism professionals" (TPGA, "Mission").

Learning

One of the most challenging yet important facets of the ally role is the willingness to learn from autistic adults, model change, and admit mistakes. Rosa and Wilson started out knowing only the dominant framing of autism as medical tragedy. Interactions and experiences—offline and online—led them eventually to advocate for autism acceptance instead. Their blogs were one important way they connected with alternative views of autism.

Rosa described the changes in "Self-Pity Is for Suckers" (the text of an address she gave at the national BlogHer convention). Her blog was originally called "The Adventures of Leelo the Soon-to-Be-Not-Autistic-boy and His Potty-Mouthed Mom," reflecting her desire to document the road to cure. She reported: : “I embraced self-pity. I let it define me. I was not alone; at the time there were plenty of other prominent autism parent voices in the Blogosphere who were floundering right along with me.” She then started encountering parents who rejected this position and confronted her, to which she “recoiled, petulantly.” Eventually, “I started hearing from people who told me I needed to reject self-pity so I could get to work,” and she connected with “autistic people, parents, and professionals who told me that seeing autism as suckage was seeing my son as suckage. That he deserved better…. And that is what I blog about now.”

Blogs are distinctively suited to demonstrating how allies continue to grow and learn through personal experience. For example, “inclusion—it’s not just for school” described how Wilson unwittingly took over an event in a way that excluded an adult autistic friend: “We’d invited an autistic friend into the room and then failed to ask for their input, their involvement, their participation.” She concluded: “But how many times does our own inherently ableist behavior go unchecked? How many times do we open the door and think that’s enough? It’s not.” Blogs also enable guest posts or links directly to autistic adults so that readers learn from them, too, and comments show parent readers engaging with autistic advocates.

Additionally, norms among bloggers encourage archiving past blog posts and discourage bloggers from editing or deleting previous entries so that blogs publicly chronicle changes in attitudes and thinking. The unedited archive shows readers how and why these bloggers moved towards autism acceptance. Wilson went so far as to collect in a sidebar entitled “why I can’t support autism speaks” the links to posts that show the chronology and reasoning for her break with that prominent organization. Being able to speak about their own evolution (and readers’ ability to see it for themselves, either by following along as it happened or by following links in the archives) makes these bloggers’ other ally activism practices more persuasive. Each represents herself not as perfect but as willing to listen and admit mistakes.

Implications for Maternal Activism

> Together, we’ll test the waters out there when it’s right. We will humanize autism. We’ll spread our message of acceptance, understanding, and compassion. We’ll get the word out about the desperate need for research, support, and services. We’ll talk about why it matters so damn much. And then we’ll come back here and do what we do every day—together. (Wilson, “huffington post”).

These blogs demonstrate how telling stories online and building communities around those stories can contribute to the goal of changing the conversation about autism. Through advocating, personalizing, supporting, educating, and learning, these blogs show alternative ways of mothering autistic children and make a compelling case for seeing autistic children and their mothers in a new light. NT mothers who blog are well situated to play an ally role because the mom blog is a familiar genre that appeals to a variety of readers, not only other mothers of autistic children, but also mothers of NT children, teachers, and therapists. When posts from these blogs run in the parenting sections of *Huffington Post* or *BlogHer*, they gain an even broader audience. Readers who are unlikely to seek out an advocacy website encounter autism acceptance contextualized in stories of mothering, and their comments testify to having gained new perspectives. Not all online storytelling about mothering autistic children has activist goals, and there have been rifts between some autistic advocates and some NT parents. Consequently, Rosa and Wilson are significant for demonstrating how mom bloggers can be allies rather than adversaries to autistic self-advocacy and acceptance.

As important as the content of their blogs are the ways that the process of blogging and commenting transformed authors and readers. Narrating everyday life in public and engaging with readers, including those from outside one's immediate social circle, have potential to politicize. Wilson reflected: "I'm not a political animal by nature. I'm becoming one, however, by necessity…. My kids, our kids, everyone on the spectrum, needs more than we can give them individually" ("#gladididn'tsaycamelot"). Blogging was a vehicle for arriving at that realization and then acting upon it.

Being an ally blogger is not without challenges, however. For example, how do mothers write authentically about experiences—positive and negative—without violating their child's privacy and or feeding the dominant narrative of autism as a tragedy and parents as its victims? In a post entitled "thoughtful, not scrubbed," Wilson articulated the balancing act she strives to achieve: showing respect for autistic individuals but without "sanitizing our narratives to the point where they're one-dimensional—and not remotely recognizable or believable because they're no longer real." Both authors model ways of seeing and writing about autism that acknowledge challenges while honouring dignity and celebrating difference. Equally important, they amplify autistic voices, and when their own words fail to strike a balance, they listen and learn. The long-form story or essay in a blog has a greater capacity for this kind of nuanced balancing than other social media forms that are shorter and more short term.

There is considerable labour associated with blogging in this thoughtful, political, self-reflexive way. Producing content and responding to comments are mostly uncompensated (Rosa's site has a couple of ads for autism-related books), and the time involved is considerable. In some years, Rosa and Wilson logged over two-hundred posts, and most received at least some comments to which they often responded. Moderating a community of readers also entails an emotional response (and responsibility). Wilson eventually created a Community Support Page when she became overwhelmed at the prospect of responding personally to the many requests for help that came her way. Each author has come in for criticism—some of it public, some of it communicated privately, some of it bluntly worded. Responding, reflecting, and changing are a kind of labour, too. The sustainability challenges of this maternal activism parallel concerns in the larger online feminist movement, where uncompensated labour risks burnout and may only be possible for those activists who have resources and time (Martin and Valenti 22-23).

Sustainability is an issue not only for bloggers but also for the blog genre. Mom blogs are less prominent and popular than they once were. Both Rosa and Wilson blog less frequently now; their online presence is distributed across a variety of platforms, including posts on *BlogHer*, *Huffington Post*, *TPGA*, Twitter, and Facebook. These platforms expand the reach of their message and share with others some of the responsibility for content. Tweets or status updates require less time to produce (and can be posted from a mobile phone). However, these other platforms lack some of the distinctive features of mom blogs that this analysis has identified as particularly conducive for autism acceptance ally activism: the ability to make a case in long form and without interruption; the capability for interaction in a community created through regular reading and commenting; and the opportunity for individuals with different views to engage with one another. A challenge for these and other mom blog activists is to coordinate a multiplatform online presence that capitalizes on the advantages of new platforms while sustaining the ability for personal reflection and ongoing community interaction.

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