

Just a word of warning: there are some things in this talk that will be difficult for you to listen to. I'm going to be blunt about a few things that are Not Comfortable.

Question: How many of you have driven with children in the car?

So, I want you to imagine this scenario for a bit. You're driving the car down a main street, meaning lots of traffic and traffic lights. It's snowing semi-heavily - not enough to declare a snow day, but enough that visibility is limited. And you have children in the back seat; children who - as children are wont to do - are yelling, "Mommy, mommy, she's hitting me!" "Daddy, daddy, he won't stop poking me!" Constantly, without stopping. Loudly.

For a lot of autistics, that intensity of stimulus is happening all the time. All day, every day. Maybe there are good days, where it's like it isn't snowing. And then there are bad days, when you're stuck in the house because of a snow storm and you're trying to handle meals and the children are going insane from being stuck inside and they're yelling every ten minutes and you just *don't get a break*.

You've heard examples like this before, I'm sure. If you haven't, you definitely should have. This is the kind of sensory stimulation that we live with day in, day out. The kind where sometimes, you just have to hit something to try to control the input, or because you have a sense that *isn't* producing that kind of stimulation and so it's as though that sensory system doesn't exist.

And then you put us in a room full of people - some of whom listen, but others of whom inform us that we're broken. We're not real people. But, you know, we can talk - or type - so we're not *really* autistics, either. So no, we really have no idea what their child is like and it's an insult that we point out that there are some elements of autism that can be positive, that can be strengths.

But of course, even if we're not *real* autistics, we're still broken. We don't move like them, we don't talk like them - if we can talk. We don't react like them. We don't make eye contact. We're emotionless machines. We have no empathy. We fidget rather than focusing all our attention on whoever's speaking. And so on, and so on.

Now imagine what it would be like if *you* were constantly being told that. All the time. Told that your neurology is a *disease*. (Trust me, there are a number of articles about the horrors of neurotypical syndrome floating around the autistic community.) That they know all about you, and anything you say contrary to that is obviously a lie. That if you're playing with your hair or tapping your fingers while someone is talking, you aren't listening. That you have to do things that physically *hurt* you because that's how *real people* interact.

That parents killing their children who are *just like you were at their age* should be viewed with compassion. That they had *such* trials, and it was better for their child who is just like you were to die, because they obviously would have no quality of life.

How would you feel?

As Patricia so often reminds people, one of the strengths of the autistic neurotype is pattern

recognition. We're autistic. If people don't object to autistics being killed because they are autistic and "difficult to handle", what do you think we conclude about what people would think/feel/say if *we* were killed?

I'm lucky. My blog doesn't get the sort of flame wars that happen on the blogs of more well-known (AKA mostly US) autistic advocates. I only really started being a *full* advocate with CAPP, just over 2 years ago. And I tend to read Twitter *very* carefully, mostly just looking at my notifications, in order to avoid some of the - honestly speaking, absolute *filth* that gets shoved at autistics on there. So I haven't really experienced burning out of advocacy at this point. But I have what I call a blog circle, a number of whom haven't posted in over a year... and a number of those have stopped because of advocacy burnout.

So what is one of the major prices of advocacy for autistics? Burnout. Being so wrung out from constantly having to defend ourselves, our lives, and our neurology to people who aren't willing to listen - or who, even worse, tell us that we're *wrong*. That we don't know what we're talking about. That *they* are the experts, and we should just shut up and get out of the way because we're broken, and we're also not *real* autistics.

And the consequences of burnout can be extreme - all the way up to suicide.

In conclusion, [show websites]

But You Don't Look Sick.com. A site about invisible disabilities, mostly physical - but mental health issues and neurodiverse conditions fall under that umbrella as well. [If Patricia is on before, ref "but you don't look autistic".]

TPGA A major resource site; most of their articles are written by autistics.

We Are Like Your Child: I know of autistic advocates who as children were non-verbal, had violent meltdowns, had toilet training issues. And autism is a delay... it's *not* a developmental stop. So yes. We *are* like your child.