

Autistic people's struggles often become more obvious as we grow older and more is expected of us.

The traditional coming-of-age process for neurotypical people usually involves a set of expectations that autistic people might not be able to achieve:

- learning to drive as soon as it's legally possible
- moving out of your parents' house by the age of 18-19
- going to college and getting a degree after graduating from high school
- or, getting a job right after graduating from high school
- living independently right out of college

And here are some of the things people are expected *not* to do, past the age of 18:

- frequently forget to eat, bathe, exercise, do laundry, etc.
- need lots of assistance with daily organization and scheduling
- have meltdowns and shutdowns
- get lost and confused easily, due to overstimulation in public places

Those are just some examples. Many autistic adults still live with their parents. Yes, even autistic adults who might otherwise be perceived as having "low support needs," and even those who have gone to college/are in college, still live with their parents.

**A 2013 study found that only 17% of autistic people aged 21 to 25 had ever lived independently, and that since graduating high school, 9 out of 10 autistic people had spent some time living with their parents.** This is culturally frowned upon, and seen as taboo. Why?

In modern capitalist society, once you age out of childhood, you are expected to function independently. **The maternal care economy of the childhood home gives way to the profit-based economy of neoliberal capitalism.** Potential workers are supposed to be fit for exploitation, separated from their families and community support networks.

**Societies and economies did not always function like this.** In matrilineal societies with gift economies, the cultural value of maternal care permeates all aspects of life. In many such societies, families live in large houses, with multiple generations under the same roof. The middle-aged generations take care of the children, elders, and disabled. Society as a whole is focused on caregiving and community-building.

There are many matrilineal societies around the world with these historical practices, many of them indigenous societies which have been ruthlessly exploited and destroyed by the forces of settler-colonialism.

What I am trying to articulate here, is that most of the hardship autistic people face is a function of the way our society is structured. Caregiving is seen as necessary for children, but only to a certain point, and only to raise them to be good workers. **But autistic people are not built to be “good workers” in the capitalist sense. There’s a reason why 85% of autistic college graduates are unemployed.**

When autistic people are still children, it’s seen as acceptable for us to receive caregiving. But once we reach “working age” and still need caregiving, suddenly our challenges with executive function and social interaction are seen as incredibly disabling. **That’s not because we’ve somehow become more “impaired” over time, it’s because the expectations placed on us by society have shifted.**

I’m not arguing that autistic people shouldn’t learn skills and tools for increased independence. Learning ways to manage executive function can help us tremendously with reaching our own goals and pursuing our own interests. **But I am calling into question the reasons behind the societal expectation that adults shouldn’t live with their parents, and that adults should not receive caregiving.**

**Everyone needs caregiving, and everyone needs strong communities to support them.** The fact that our society & economy is set up the way it is has caused a great deal of struggle and strife among all members of the working class. Rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide have skyrocketed over the past two decades. People are struggling to pay off massive amounts of student debt, and to pay massive medical bills. People are isolated from family and friends, often having to choose between financially supporting their kids and spending quality time with them.

**The world should not be set up like this.**

So, to all of the autistic people out there who have tried going to college and dropped out, who have tried getting jobs and been turned down or fired, who have tried living alone but been unable to manage the tasks involved, this post is for you. You are worthy. You are enough. It’s not your fault that you were

born in a world built to deny you the right to exist. Keep fighting.  
We can build a better world together.

~Eden 🐸