

## CHAPTER 12

# THE INTIMATE SCREEN: REVISUALIZING UNDERSTANDINGS OF DOWN SYNDROME THROUGH DIGITAL ACTIVISM ON INSTAGRAM

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When Christy and her husband Danny found out that their unborn child had Down syndrome (Ds), they were devastated. Their only knowledge about Ds at the time had come from the media's mostly negative portrayal. As a result, all their initial thoughts were negative and they feared the worst. These feelings transformed, however, when their daughter Bailey was born. After getting to know her, they realized how false their perceptions had been. Danny and Christy enjoyed life with Bailey so much that two years later they were on a plane to Lithuania to adopt another child with Ds—an almost-three-year-old girl named Abby who had lived all of her life in an orphanage. Largely because of her personal experiences, Christy has become an advocate for children with Ds and for the adoption of children with special needs. Her activist work is most visible on the social media platform Instagram ([www.instagram.com/cjpics](http://www.instagram.com/cjpics)), a primarily visual site that allows users to post pictures and videos, compose captions, and create hashtags that link individuals and communities together. Christy's rhetorical purpose on Instagram is to overcome dominant, mostly negative perceptions of Ds perpetuated through the media and popular culture and to raise awareness.

In our rhetorical analysis of her CJPICS Instagram page, we find that Christy seeks to overcome these stereotypes by including images, captions, and hashtags that challenge viewers' understandings of Ds and that instill a sense of intimacy with her audience. In contrast to more direct forms of advocacy, Christy's activism is more understated and organic, encouraging viewers to change their misperceptions by recoding the unfamiliar into that which is known and celebrated. We suggest that such digital activism employs what we call the "intimate screen"—an extension of Kevin Michael DeLuca's and Jennifer Peeples' (2002)

concept of the public screen—that cultivates a supportive, empathetic public through familiarity. Christy’s purposeful engagement with social media encourages audiences to adopt new ways of understanding not only Ds but also the people defined by this label. We argue that Christy’s intimate screen is a form of digital activism that invites the public into her life through personal imagery, thus undermining dominant perceptions of Ds and promoting special-needs adoption. Christy creates a community of like-minded individuals by visually and narratively transforming the foreignness of Ds into a life that is celebrated and familiar, reframing what it means to live with a disability. Extensive work has been conducted about the intersections of writing with disability studies (Brueggemann, 2001; Fox, 2013; Lewiecki-Wilson, 2003; Lewiecki-Wilson & Brueggemann, 2008; Price, 2011). This essay suggests one way that social media advocacy for children with disabilities can proceed, especially when the goal emphasizes awareness. We propose that digital activism with the goal of awareness can employ different rhetorical structures than direct political protest. We conclude by making applications from this study to digital activism through Instagram and other social media.

## **TOWARDS A THEORY OF THE INTIMATE SCREEN**

Scholars have begun to interrogate how digital activism works and the ways it commonly mirrors grassroots protest. Inquiries into social media events such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street suggest that such activism is often explicitly political and effective through the quick circulation of information (Dadurka & Pigg, 2011; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Howard & Parks, 2012; Khondker, 2011; Lotan, Graeff, Ananny, Gaffney, & Pearce, 2011; McKee, 2011; Obar, Zube, & Lampe, 2012; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). More recent studies have begun to illuminate the unique features of social media activism, maintaining that such advocacy often operates via online networks that democratize media communication and thereby enable effective dissent (Buck, 2012; Carroll & Hackett, 2006; Forbes, 2014; Gerbaudo, 2012; Harb, 2011; Peary, 2014; Scott & Welch, 2014). In order to understand how media is imbricated in activism, DeLuca and Peeples (2002) introduced a productive supplement to the well-known concept of the public sphere, which describes the social formation of favored policies and mores. While the public sphere emphasizes the ways public talk shapes culture, the “public screen” accentuates the importance of media and dissemination. As they wrote, “Such a concept takes technology seriously. It recognizes that most important, public discussions take place via ‘screens’—television, computer, and the front page of newspapers” (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002, p. 131). DeLuca and Peeples underscored that instead of talk, au-

diences come to understand major public issues largely through the circulation of images and videos. The imagistic aspect of the public must be accounted for in discussions about the social formation of culture. In particular, DeLuca and Peebles insisted that the public screen is an important component of effective twenty-first-century activism. Through the public screen, protestors can organize “image events,” or staged acts of protest designed for mass media dissemination that dramatically expose injustice by garnering media attention to shock the audience (DeLuca, 1999). DeLuca and Peebles (2002) attended to the 1999 World Trade Organization protestors in Seattle who used violence to attract television news agencies to cover their cause. For these authors, this strategy anticipated the national media attention necessary to galvanize further activism. The lesson afforded by thinking about the public screen is that successful activism must contend with the constraints and opportunities of the mediums through which audiences come to understand their cause. In this regard, effective digital activism must grapple with the affordances of social media and the various screens users engage.

As such, we would reconfigure DeLuca and Peebles’ concept by suggesting that Christy deploys an “intimate screen” as a form of digital activism. DeLuca and Peebles were writing in a time shortly before the explosion of social media and much of their discussion was focused on how the public screen aggregates mass attention. In the contemporary moment, however, screens are not solely directed at mass audiences. Indeed, most social network users—particularly for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—are engaging with these media on smaller, individualized screens such as smartphones and tablets. A number of studies and scholars have contended that smartphone users interact with these devices on a deeply personal level (Acheson, Barratt, & Balthazar, 2013; Lambert, 2013; Perlow, 2013). To peruse social media or play games on these devices cultivates a particularly intimate relationship with the device and a mediated or mobile intimacy with friends and others (Hjorth & Richardson, 2014; Ito & Daisuke, 2005; Siebert, 2013). Given how users interact with social media, it behooves scholars to consider how digital activism engages with the privacy of the individualized screen. On our read, Christy deploys the personalization of digital devices in her rhetorical imaging strategies to cultivate an intimate public. These activist images and captions are not shocking image events that garner mass media attention like traditional forms of public screen activism. Rather, Christy’s rhetorical imaging strategies assume an individual viewer interacting with her Instagram page in a particularly personal manner. Her visuals are serene, even quotidian, revealing the joy and contentment in raising children with Ds. As we will show, such tactics operate as a clandestine invitation that encourages the audience to feel at home, even comforted, by her depictions. Here, digital activism

is not the mass spectacle of the public screen but rather an approach that impacts the viewer through familiarity and intimacy with her life.

In this chapter, we take seriously the way the audience accesses and experiences images. Because Instagram is designed for the smartphone, successful activist strategies must impact the viewer as she scrolls through a barrage of photographs. We argue that Christy's activism highlights several characteristics of intimate screen activism: the use of images that engender familiarity with Ds; images that counter misperceptions of Ds through their subject and depiction; the use of visually stunning or shocking images to aesthetically impact the viewer; and images that allow the viewer to peek in on the banal, creating a sense of identification with the cause. These strategies are devised to capture the personal attention of the smartphone viewer. In this way Christy's awareness campaign encourages viewers to see Ds differently and to become intimately invested in her family and their cause.

To better understand how Christy deploys the intimate screen, we collected data from Christy's Instagram page, including the images, captions, and hashtags she uses. We also conducted two interviews with Christy.<sup>1</sup> We coded the images and the interviews using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) where we examined the data, identified common themes, and made generalizations about the rhetorical tactics Christy used. To analyze these data, we employed the tools of visual rhetorical analysis and grounded theory to demonstrate what activism that uses an intimate screen looks like. Cara A. Finnegan (2004) described visual rhetoric as a "project of inquiry that considers the implications for rhetorical theory of sustained attention to visuality" (p. 235). We use visual rhetorical analysis to consider how the images on Christy's page cultivate an intimacy with her audience while simultaneously encouraging that audience to see Ds differently. We attend to Christy's imaging tactics, which include the visual style and composition of the images on CJPICS, the specific appeals Christy uses, the relationship between the image and the accompanying text, and the themes that emerge in the photographs and videos.<sup>2</sup>

## DEPLOYING THE INTIMATE SCREEN

Christy began using Instagram when it first appeared in 2010, mostly to

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1 We first learned about Christy's Instagram page through Kara's sister. Kara started following Christy's page three years ago as Christy's family was adopting Abby.

2 We have secured appropriate IRB approval and Christy has given us permission to use her words and images. We use "CJPICS" to refer to the Instagram page; we use "Christy" to refer to the person who shapes the Instagram page.

document her son's and daughter's lives. However, when she and her husband adopted Abby from Lithuania in 2013, her page became much more focused on Ds and special needs adoption. Her current Instagram description reads, "Finding humor and experiencing joy every day as the mama to three extraordinary kids. Adoption and Ds have blessed our lives!" Through her posts and hashtags, Christy has gained a following. As of May 15, 2016, Christy has more than 21,000 followers on Instagram.

In much the same way as Christy and her husband discovered the truth of their new life with a Ds child, Christy invites her followers to rethink prevailing assumptions. Priya Lalvani (2008) argued that mothers of children with Ds commonly resignify the meaning of Ds in order to counter negative stereotypes. Likewise, Christy primarily uses Instagram to overcome the dominant perceptions and unnecessary anxieties about Ds that she readily admits she and her husband felt when they were told their unborn daughter had Ds. In this section, we illustrate how Christy counters these assumptions through her digital activism.

Our analysis highlights the characteristics of the intimate screen and the hashtags Christy employs by using these as section headings. On Instagram, hashtags classify content, enable users to search for particular sets of images, and as with CJPICS, create a sense of community when users adopt, search for, or click the hashtag link. Thus, we organize our analysis by highlighting the different modes of rhetorical activism at stake on CJPICS.

## **ENGENDERING FAMILIARITY: #DOWNSYNDROMEROCKS AND #DOWNSYNDROMELOVE**

One of the main purposes of Christy's Instagram feed is to counter the notion that children with Ds are all that dissimilar from other children. An important aspect of her visual strategies is to illustrate the intelligence of her two daughters. The images posted on CJPICS do not simply announce the acumen of Christy's children but rather present everyday images that highlight how Abby and Bailey master early education tasks. In effect, her rhetorical tactics do not assert arguments or directly address misperceptions. Instead, her advocacy operates by inviting the viewer to engage with scenes that familiarize the audience with what it means to live with Ds and to recognize that her children's lives are filled with many of the same struggles and joys as other children.

In one short video from March 2014, Christy's three-year-old daughter, Abby, counts to ten. The scene is rather ordinary: the child faces a set of foam numbers and repeats the numbers as her mother prompts her. The shot is cropped to create a cozy vignette. The child's face remains out of the frame,

with the camera pointed at the lower portion of her body. The framing of the image conveys the intimacy we argue is essential to Christy's advocacy. The tight cropping encourages the viewer to engage with the sheltered scene as though she were in that same moment. The realism of the video highlights the quotidian nature of the interaction. Similarly, the caption announces, "Abby counts!" with the hashtag #downsyndromelove. As emphasized by this hashtag, the scene is sweet, even charming—its warmth attracts viewers and asks them to see the child's accomplishments as typical. The intimacy of the scene enables the viewer to share that same triumph while the content of the video situates the child as a learning, intelligent pupil.

CJPICS also creates familiarity with her audience by showing the normalcy of her kids' lives. In most of the images presented on CJPICS, the girls are shown in common childhood activities. In one image from February 2014, Abby, Bailey, and two friends play with an interactive light wall while visiting a children's museum. Four girls with mesmerized faces are lined up at the exhibit. The image is grainy, shot by a smartphone camera while the photographer was moving. The quality of the image adds to the realism of the moment, positioning the viewer as peeking in on a typical day in the life of these children. The viewer finds herself not just an impartial observer but lucky enough to feel connected to these children and their private moments. Similarly, a video from January 2014 shows the girls sitting together in a plastic tub, giggling and being silly. The short film centers on the two girls and, much like the previous photograph, situates the viewer as secretly watching the world constructed between two imaginative children. These rhetorical imaging strategies counter the notion that children with Ds are different from other kids in negative ways. Instead, the viewer is encouraged to view these children with a sense of wonder—as original, clever, and curious children. Here, CJPICS emphasizes the precocity of her daughters through these intimate, connective moments.

### **COUNTERING MISPERCEPTIONS: #BRINGINGTHESUNSHINE AND #SOSTINKINGCUTE**

In addition to challenging the perception that Ds is a burden by showing how her children are similar to other kids, Christy also uses Instagram to show how her daughters are unique. Linda Gilmore, Jennifer Campbell, and Monica Cuskelly (2003) argued that public perceptions of Ds indicate that many believe children with Ds have relatively similar personalities and are always happy and affectionate. Likewise, Christy's use of the intimate screen works by deploying images that counter the notion that children with Ds are all similar by showing the distinct personalities of her daughters and applauding their differences

from other children. Christy regularly includes images and captions that show and describe their personalities and challenging moments categorized by #bringingthesunshine.

In one video, for instance, Christy shows the mischievous side of her daughter. She asks Bailey, “What do you want to eat?” Bailey replies, “Fries.” Christy laughs and says, “What about something else that is more healthy?” Bailey says, “Cay-cay [candy].” Christy giggles again and says, “No, what else can we eat?” And Bailey repeats “cay-cay” over and over again with a big smile on her face while her mother laughs. The caption reads, “Her suggestions for an after- nap snack include fries and candy. What happened to the little girl that refused to eat sugar?!? #dailybailey #bringingthesunshine.” Such posts underscore the idea that Bailey’s sassy personality brings sunshine to her family and, by extension, to us. By focusing on her children’s individual attributes, Christy redirects and challenges the viewer’s understanding of Ds and of children with Ds.

When Christy uses the hashtag #bringingthesunshine, she often includes another hashtag with it: #sostinkingcute. In these posts, Christy highlights how the girls’ appearance is actually a positive attribute, not something to be viewed as negative. Images with this hashtag demonstrate how cute she views her children to be—how her kids’ eyes smile when they laugh; how their laughs are infectious; how the faces they make can brighten up a room; how flexible they are because of their syndrome; how even when they’re in trouble, they’re still grinning. Christy’s emphasis on joy aims to challenge the notion that families with special needs children are miserable. Once again, Christy repeats one of the main misperceptions of Ds: that those living with Ds are always happy. Indeed, the vast majority of images on CJPICS show the girls smiling and laughing. Yet, her general tactics also emphasize the complexity of her children’s emotions, the combination of happiness and deviousness, the difficult days spent in the hospital after surgeries, the cute arguments that emerge between her children, and the fits that can be thrown. Although her kids are young and have challenges still to come, Christy emphasizes how their physical appearance and sweet spirits bring joy and sunshine to those around them. Christy defies the perception that children with Ds are a burden. Not only are the lives of family members impacted by Ds not miserable or dismal, but they are actually happy, blessed, and lucky. This point is also indicated by her use of the hashtags #blessingnotburden and #theluckyfew. Throughout these imaging strategies, Christy uses the intimacy of the personal screen to connect to audiences and challenge their inaccurate assumptions. However, instead of explicitly condemning her viewers’ assumptions, she uses intimacy to emphasize how fortunate she is to be raising these children, a strategy that invites her viewers to be less defensive or suspicious about Christy’s motives.



## USING STUNNING IMAGES: #ADOPTIONLOVE AND #SPECIALNEEDSADOPTION

Yet another goal for Christy includes the promotion of special needs adoption. While Christy is more explicit with her advocacy in this area, most of her rhetorical tactics are less assertive and often rely on the aesthetic appeal of the image or an appeal to her audience's emotions to make her case. For instance, in a post from June 2014, CJPICS presented an image of her daughter Abby from her Lithuanian identification card. Christy acknowledges, "This is only one of three pictures we have of her from before we started the adoption process." Yet instead of focusing on the child's living conditions or even her adoption process, Christy writes, "Oh my word! Those cheeks! That hair!! #adoptionlove #specialneedsadoption." Through the use of a still image, Christy can displace the anxieties surrounding international or special needs adoption by focusing on the cute infant. Thus, while the viewer may certainly know the obstacles involved in adoption and in the transition process, she can delight in the precious imagery presented. With this image, the intimacy of the personal device comes to the fore. Social media is well known for how users oversupply cute images of children. Christy certainly uses this strategy, but here the cute image emphasizes the happiness of adoption, not the larger system and difficulties at play, and appeals to the viewer's emotional capacities for sympathy. Thus, the intimate screen works as a form of advocacy by trafficking in charming photographs but shifting the focus to the positive aspects of international special needs adoption.

One of the strategies CJPICS uses to visually show how special needs adoption can change a life is to show side-by-side images of Abby before she was adopted and afterwards. Though they only have three images of Abby before they met her at the orphanage, the images are striking when compared to Abby after she was brought home. In the orphanage images, three-year-old Abby is rarely smiling, and her mouth turns downward. Her brown eyes seem empty, almost lifeless. She is well fed, well clothed, and cared for as well as the orphanage workers could, but she is often serious, cold, and withdrawn. Contrast this child with images even five months later where Abby is beaming, laughing, happy, and full of life. Her entire demeanor seems to have changed. Christy attributes this transition to being loved and wanted and, through stunning images, often pleads with her followers to consider adopting extraordinary children like Abby. Christy uses these stunning images to cause strong feelings of affection and sympathy in her viewers and hopefully move at least one person to act. In one particular side-by-side image comparison (see Figure 12.1), Christy writes,

Honestly, until we were blessed with Bailey . . . , we were never interested in adopting. That was for families with more



money, more free time, [etc.]. But when we realized parenting a child with special needs was a blessing, not a burden, and then found out about all the children with Ds wasting away in orphanages across the world, how could we not say yes?



*Figure 12.1. Abby in the orphanage and Abby with her new family. Reprinted with permission.*

Christy's comparison photographs visually arrest the viewer, demonstrating that this child's life was dramatically changed through adoption. The point is to impact the viewer emotionally through glimpsing the visual change that occurred. Her appeal to pathos confirms the argument made by Bronwyn T. Williams in this collection that social media writers are concerned with emotional responses from their audience. As CJPICS has gained more followers, Christy's Instagram page now features other children with Ds who are available for adop-

tion. Often, the images Christy selects are close-ups of children who could be adopted. The images center on the cute infant or are visually arresting images of children in need of help. One post from July 2014 shows two infants cuddled together in a Ukrainian orphanage. The close shots are similar to newborn photography, and the glow lens Christy uses gives the photographs a romantic air, a style that deploys intimacy to evoke viewers' affections. Christy likewise appeals to her followers when they have an opportunity to give financially. In one post, she features a three-month-old child with Ds named Finnley, showing an image of the baby in a hospital bed with tubes in his little body. After briefly telling his story, she writes: "One thing I love about this little IG community is how supportive everyone is, and this is a member of our community that could really use some support and encouragement. Will you please help me by reaching out to them?" Christy appeals to her followers on behalf of another "Ds mama" who reached out to Christy about her sick child. By highlighting the need for community support, she creates group identification for the cause.

In sum, much of Christy's activism and imaging strategies for special needs adoption focus on the joy of adoption. Children with Ds are not portrayed as helpless or difficult; instead, they are presented in visually stunning modes that encourage viewers to recognize the happiness entailed in growing alongside these children. Such images on the smaller, hand-held screen are intimate in that they connect the audience to Christy's family and her advocacy in a personal way. Much like a wallet photograph, the viewer can pull out her personal device and visually relate to this mother, her family, and her causes.

## **ENCOURAGING IDENTIFICATION THROUGH THE BANAL: #THELUCKYFEW AND #BLESSINGNOTBURDEN**

Yet another aspect of the intimate screen is that the imagery is not shocking, but rather banal, quotidian. The point of such a tactic is to create identification between the viewer, the subject, and the larger cause. Such identification is important on social media platforms like Instagram because, except in cases where the page is set to private, anyone can follow a page, whether you know the person or not. As a result, strangers can find and follow pages (see Les Hutchinson in this collection for more on the stranger and anonymity online), and it is up to the social media user to keep them from unfollowing. For Christy, she keeps her followers by encouraging them to identify with her images. Much like other social media users, Christy rarely photographs the less appealing aspects of child rearing and family life, or if she does, it's to note the humor in the situation. Instead, her purpose is to familiarize the viewer with raising children with special needs. Bernie Hogan (2010) wrote that social media often enables users

to curate their lives in ways that only exhibit positive qualities. With CJPICS, such an imaging strategy is not simply to aggrandize her own life but rather to present visual evidence that minimizes the negative perceptions of Ds. Christy uses photo-editing techniques that make her images charming and warm. She also uses glow filters, black-and-white photographs, cropping, and other tactics that highlight the happiness of her life, not the struggles. She occasionally overlays text or hashtags on photos to emphasize a particular point or to promote a hashtag she wants her viewers to see.

Throughout these imaging strategies, Christy rhetorically frames her life as an intimate scene that invites her viewers to rejoice with her rather than to pity her or her children. For instance, in May 2013, Christy posted an image of her daughter Bailey minutes after leaving the hospital. Bailey had been hospitalized for ten days with a respiratory illness. The shot is a close-up of Bailey's smiling face outside beside grass. The image is cropped with rounded edges, a technique that mimics photographs from the mid-twentieth century. On top of the photograph, Christy has included the word "freedom!" and a heart that looks as though it has been hand-drawn. While the viewer might be obliquely aware that children with Ds often experience respiratory conditions and are prone to infection, this image highlights the joyful aftermath of hospitalization. The child is grinning from ear to ear, and the viewer understands her life as difficult but joyful.

Another way Christy utilizes the intimate screen is by posting pictures of Abby and Bailey to encourage viewers to connect to her girls as individuals—to see them beyond their diagnosis—and also to nuance her audience's view of children with Ds. When the children achieve a new goal, Christy posts about it, praising them for their progress. Her praise then shows readers that these girls are working hard to grow and change: When they do reach a goal or overcome some difficulty, it is to be celebrated. Viewers are cheering for these girls to make progress rather than focusing on their differences from other children. Not only is this tactic persuasive rhetorically, but it also offers viewers a way to feel that they, too, are advocating for these issues. In one post from June 2014, Abby and Bailey are sitting in chairs in a waiting room eating popcorn and sitting in the same contorted position. Christy's caption reads: "Two little pretzels eating popcorn. #abbyandbailey #downsyndromelove." In this image, Christy tries to highlight the humorous aspect of one feature of Ds—flexibility. The viewer comes to see flexibility as a positive, and to see these children as more than their condition. Once again, the point is to foster identification between the audience and children.

Once she has helped to cultivate identification, Christy encourages the viewer to see Ds differently. In one image posted in February 2014, the girls are on

a playground that has a divided slide (see Figure 12.2). Bailey is lying on her tummy on one side of the slide, poised to slide down headfirst. Abby is standing on the slide next to Abby, holding onto the rails and looking timidly down it.



*Figure 12.2. Abby and Bailey going down the slide. Reprinted with permission.*

Christy’s caption reads, “One has an over abundance [sic] of caution and one has not a cautious bone in her body. But I’ll never tell who is who. #abbyand-bailey #downsyndromerocks.” By describing each girl’s approach to the slide, Christy shows how the girls are dissimilar. Readers are able to see Bailey as someone without fear and Abby as a girl who takes things a little more carefully, thus seeing them as individuals with distinct interests, personalities, and behaviors. Christy subtly shows how the girls are different, once again focusing on the “girls as people” rather than the “girls as their condition.” In short, although Christy often uses the hashtag #morealikethandifferent to show how people with Ds are



more similar to those without than we might think, she uses #abbyandbailey to point out how people with Ds are not all the same.

In these images, the strategy of identification through the banal is part of the overall activism of the intimate screen. The girls are shown doing everyday activities and while their Ds is noted as part of their unique personalities, the fact that they have Ds is not the main focus. Instead, the noticeable, distinct personalities of each girl come to the fore and allow readers to glimpse their individual charms, an important distinction to make for viewers unknowledgeable about people with Ds. Christy thus uses one rhetorical affordance of social media—the ability to make both visual and verbal comparisons—to make viewers not only empathetic with the girls about their condition but also to make us smile about their distinctive characteristics. Because viewers are engaging with these girls on a personal screen, they become further connected to them. In all, the intimate screen offers Christy a way to engage in digital activism in subtle, nuanced, and personal ways. By embracing familiarity, countering misperceptions, using stunning images, and celebrating banal scenes, Christy not only invites her audience into her life but she also seeks to develop awareness and connection. As such, her Instagram page is rhetorically persuasive.

## **DISCUSSION: ADVOCACY AND INSTAGRAM**

As our analysis indicates, Christy uses an intimate screen to advocate for Ds and special needs adoption. By showing everyday pictures of her family's life and by including captions and hashtags that further elaborate on the image, she cultivates an intimate public that invites this audience to journey with her as she navigates what she calls “blessings” of both. All the while, these visual tactics aim to encourage her audience to revisualize people with Ds as individuals who can live vibrant lives and to be more knowledgeable about Ds. Furthermore, the understated way in which she encourages social change by sharing the private details of her life leaves space for viewers to change their perceptions without direct confrontation. Instead, the change comes by inviting the viewer to peek in on her life and feel connected to the happy, domestic scenes she includes.

In addition, Christy's Instagram account indicates her understanding of how this medium creates opportunities and constraints for advocacy. She has thousands of followers; each image she posts is liked by hundreds, and dozens offer written responses. More generally, we know that the more followers someone has, the more influential they can be (Bakshy, Mason, Hofman, & Watts, 2011). Thus, activists who take technology seriously must consider how their audiences interact with them and how mediation changes their cause. Instagram is a unique site. Its market valuation at 35 million eclipses Facebook and Twitter with users

that surpass 300 million (Alba, 2014). A December 2014 *Wired* article proclaimed Instagram's popularity as attributable to its reliance on photographs. Up against the recognition of the impersonal aspects of social networks—the bots that comprise millions of Twitter users, that Facebook is largely a conduit for data mining and advertising—the photographic aspects of Instagram seem more personal, more human (Woollaston, 2014). Christy understands all too well the power of the photograph and short video. The image allows the viewer to connect to her cause and her children on a personal, intimate level. Thus, in some sense Christy relies on the aesthetic appeal of the visual in order to cultivate a sympathetic public. Awareness changes via the intimate screen must invite the public to identify with the people in the images. In a broader sense, then, activists who wish to enact similar awareness campaigns must stylize photographs and videos with a similar appeal.

While Christy's rhetorical acumen is very different to that of traditional activism that requires mass attention and overt action, our analysis counters a number of authors who insist that social media networks merely birth clicktivism. Slacktivism and clicktivism are terms often applied to social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and even Instagram (Jeong & Lee, 2013; Portman-Daley, 2010, 2011; Scott & Welch, 2014). It is a term that suggests users of these sites are only invested in self-presentation, not participating in true activism. Christy's deployment of images on Instagram, by contrast, helps to change misperceptions of Ds. Indeed, the fact that Christy is working to change awareness of Ds might indicate one reason why her strategies are important. Given that Christy seeks to change perceptions that she once held, she understands all too well that what is needed is a more intimate understanding of Ds, which she is glad to provide. Recent research indicates that one of the most effective, inexpensive, and dramatic ways to change public perception is to foster a personal relationship between opposing viewpoints (Hocks, 1999; Issenberg, 2014). Such scholarship has argued that people change their opinions on same-sex marriage, abortion, and a whole host of hot-button issues if they know someone who can identify with the cause and tell their story (Issenberg, 2014). In this way, intimacy is a particularly important activist strategy particularly for awareness campaigns that are conducted via screens.

Significantly, Christy's deployment of the intimate screen does not often focus on direct change. Instead, her subtle techniques revisualize Ds. On her Instagram feed, Christy's children are not depicted as a burden; they are intelligent, creative, joyful, adorable individuals who complete their family. The viewer comes to see Christy's family as a happy one in which both children and adults thrive. With her hashtag #morealikethandifferent, Christy uses implicit comparison to rewrite the narrative that people with Ds have unique capabilities, interests, and personalities that make them distinct and that complicate the

presumed sameness of all people with Ds. This approach and the visual imaging strategies Christy uses inspires viewers to see her children as human beings rather than as a genetic condition. As one of Christy's posts makes clear, she would like all people to see her kids as "just Bailey" or "just Abby." Indeed, Christy encourages the audience to see her children as individuals through how she visually creates a personal relationship with the viewer. Asimina Vasalou, Adam Joinson, and Delphine Courvoisier (2010) noted that photographs on Facebook prompted users to visit the site more often and to invest in it. They claim that more experienced users see photographs as dramatically important to their social network experience. Such an argument helps explain the exponential rise in the use of Instagram, whose daily smartphone users surpass Twitter (Russell, 2014). With CJPICS, the use of intimate imaging strategies doesn't simply increase use but rather works to congeal a community and build an advocacy network. By allowing viewers to glimpse daily life, CJPICS creates a new world where people can become more educated and reconsider their assumptions about the people impacted by Ds and special needs adoption.

The intimate screen, then, is a form of activism that works by inviting the audience to reconsider how they see particular peoples, issues, and causes. With Christy, that invitation is presented through photographs and videos that familiarize the viewer with Ds while countering misperceptions. In this sense, the intimate screen works by first acknowledging how users glimpse the images of Instagram and then recognizing that to affect viewers the image must prompt them to pause and engage with what is shown. Christy's Instagram feed is a significant rhetorical artifact because it highlights the visual architecture of such intimacy. Intimacy via screens can be fashioned by understanding the way viewers interact with their smartphones, by creating visually stunning images that engender familiarity and counter misperceptions, and by allowing viewers to identify with a story.

## CONCLUSION

This brief analysis has only begun to illuminate the ways social media digital activism can cultivate intimate networked publics. Christy uses a less overt activist approach that redirects biases against Ds and encourages viewers to celebrate the unique personalities of her children—and, by extension, others with Ds. Importantly, Ds is a remarkably misunderstood condition that can constrain the opportunities for those living with Ds. The advocacy on CJPICS, then, is not simply an imaging strategy that shows how children with Ds live. Instead, these imaging strategies rejoice in the small miracles of everyday life, the optimism of childhood, and the fact that assumptions can be false. Christy's rhetorical tac-



tics are significant here in that she does not fall prey to universalizing children with Ds or simply relaying her own assumptions. While there are moments that might rehearse exclusionary narratives, her overarching rhetorical tactics account for the uniqueness of those amazing children in her care.

The value of our analysis highlights the importance of intimacy as a mode of digital activism. Certainly, there is a vast amount of scholarly investment in traditional forms of direct civic action and even digital forms of explicit protest. Yet, this chapter illuminates the ways rhetorical tactics that create an affectionate bond between viewer, scene, and subject preclude those othering strategies entailed in assumptions about Ds. In other words, once the viewer comes to see Abby and Bailey as singular children, it becomes more difficult to label them with the stigmas associated with Ds. This is not to suggest that the viewer necessarily transforms their entire vision of children with disabilities. Indeed, more research is needed to determine the broader effects of these imaging strategies. But what this short analysis does emphasize is that even the most quotidian of rhetorical imaging strategies can impact the lives of viewers. As with CJPICS, followers invest in these children and their promise—a hopeful vision of the future that can open even more possibilities. We hope that writing and rhetoric scholars and students can apply this notion of the intimate screen to both interrogate and construct forms of digital activism on social media.

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