

Why cis women need to advocate harder for trans women online

by Olga Alexandru

Dear fellow cis women- we need to do better. We need to be more vocal and supportive of our trans sisters in online spaces, especially social media.

Have you ever publicly voiced your opinion on abortion? Or immigration? Rape culture? Chances are if you've done it on social media, you've been trolled for it. Now imagine if you instead of posting about pay inequality you posted a cute selfie and as a result got death threats. This isn't a hypothetical, for many trans women it's reality. Trans women get trolled online just for existing, for wanting to live an authentic life. And we watch this happen every single day on social media.

How often do you scroll past someone being trolled and think how awful, but carry on scrolling? This isn't about blame. We all do it. Social media has become a spectator sport where people often watch from the sidelines, not wanting to get involved. I'd hazard a guess and say that most people don't want to get involved because they don't want to open themselves up to the mob of trolls they see online. It's like if you're out in public and see an argument or a fight. Most people tend to just walk right past it. But there's more at stake here. Trans women's lives are at stake.

And for trans women of colour life is even harder. A 2018 study by **GLAAD** found that 92% of the trans women murdered in the US the previous year were women of colour. Recently, global youth charity **Ditch the Label** partnered with **Brandwatch**, a consumer intelligence platform, to study the scale of transphobia in online spaces. They found that in the US race is the biggest driver of transphobic abuse online meaning that trans people of colour are more likely to have racial abuse hurled at them on top of transphobic comments.

As cis women we need to act in solidarity with our trans sisters. We need to let them know that we are behind them and that we will not tolerate the abuse they face daily.

I only knew B from Twitter. We followed each other and interacted with each other's posts. She seemed like a fun, vivacious woman and I enjoyed watching her journey as she embraced her true self, sharing it with the world. When her partner posted on her account that B had passed away I was shocked and numb. In complete disbelief. I won't pretend that we were friends or that my grief for this person I knew only digitally is of any relevance. Her loss was felt deeply by her partner, friends, family, and the trans community that mourned for one of their own. Another one lost too soon. It made me wonder if I'd done enough to check in with her. She seemed so confident and self-assured that I assumed she didn't need help dealing with trolls and their constant onslaught. And maybe she didn't, but I never checked. I chose to believe that what I saw on social media was real, even though it often isn't.



A portrait of Angel Naira by Yax .
A fundraiser for Angel'a funeral can be found here:
www.gofundme.com/f/help-for-b-funeral-arrangements



As cis women, we have a certain privilege. That privilege does not erase the oppression, misogyny or sexism that we face but being trans adds another layer. Add to that being disabled, a woman of colour or any other marginalized identity. We need to use that privilege to help affect change for the trans community. We need to be better allies.

So what can we do? Here are some tangible things that we, cis women, can do to help trans women:

Check in with them

If you see someone being trolled online, message them to see if they're OK. Even if you don't know them or have never spoken to them before. Ask them if they are OK and what kind (if any) they need. Do not take it personally if you don't get a response or get a different one than you were hoping. Respect their wishes.

Give them back their time

Report and block trolls. Trans women spend a lot of their time blocking and reporting trolls online. This is mentally draining. It's about time we helped shoulder that burden too. We're all spending way too much time doomscrolling anyway so why not use some of that time to help out a marginalized community?

Speak up about trans issues

Do it publicly. Speak up on your timeline. Trans people need to know that they are not fighting this battle alone. They need to know that people care about their existence. Use your platform to educate others. Trans people are tired of doing all the work.

Educate yourself

Find out what's going on in your city, state, country and around the world. Is there a letter you can write to your representatives to help an issue gain visibility? Can you make sure that your children's school is trans inclusive? There are trans people in every country. Find out what trans people are fighting for in yours.

Boost their voices

Listen to people in the trans community. They will tell you what they need. Normalize uplifting trans women's voices. Normalize sharing content written by trans women. Do not speak over them. Use your privilege to elevate their causes.

Celebrate their wins

Read their books. Listen to their podcasts. Buy from trans women. Trans women's lives are not just about pain or survival, their wins deserve to be celebrated too. Their joy is important.

People often cite Martin Niemöller's quote ("First they came for the...") as a call to arms for why we should help other people. As if their humanity is not enough. My response to that is the oft-quoted phrase: **"I don't know how to explain to you that you should care about other people"**. People that don't look or sound like you. People who believe in different things. People that are human just like us and that deserve to live their lives in dignity, with joy and love, feeling safe online and in real life. We can't just care about others because of what they might do for us. We should care because of our shared humanity.