TRANSADVOCATE

Q&A: Taking a break from trans advocacy

By Cristan Williams

Published March 4, 2018 | Updated March 31, 2026
https://www.transadvocate.com/taking-a-break-from-trans-advocacy_n_22007.htm

Abstract

The TransAdvocate Q & A is where we answer your questions. If you'd like to submit a question, go to our contact page and send it in. Today's question is: Is it responsible or okay that I'm taking a hiatus from trans advocacy? Answering today's question is Cristan Williams and she writes: My short and [...]

Article



The TransAdvocate Q & A is where we answer your questions. If you'd like to submit a question, go to our contact page and send it in.

Today's question is:

Is it responsible or okay that I'm taking a hiatus from trans advocacy?

My short and very unnuanced answer is: "Of course!"

Neglecting ourselves while giving to everyone else isn't compassion. The circle of true compassion extends to oneself as well as others. We cannot give from a dry well. The trick is finding balance and honoring the truth of where we're at and what we have the capacity to do.

Having said that, here's the more nuanced answer:

Our culture makes being trans a political act and in this way, all acts of self-care we undertake are, in a very real way, acts of political resistance. Everything and I do mean EVERYTHING, regarding our trans experience is open to debate, reinterpretation, and misrepresentation by a culture that in no small way, resents our existence. Our culture is all too eager to redefine our existence for us. Addressing this situation -a condition that every trans person finds themselves in-- is, on the most fundamental of levels, an act of trans advocacy.

Upon choosing to exist, we are immediately forced to confront the falsehoods our culture tells us about what it means to be trans. Merely existing as trans in this culture is, in no small way, a political act; it is to embody the truth that the radical Black poet, Aimé Césaire spoke of in his poem A Tempest:

Prospero, you are the master of illusion.
Lying is your trademark.
And you have lied so much to me
(Lied about the world, lied about me)
That you have ended by imposing on me
An image of myself.
Underdeveloped, you brand me, inferior,
That's the way you have forced me to see myself
I detest that image! What's more, it's a lie!
But now I know you, you old cancer,
And I know myself as well.

Doing the emotional work of clearly seeing both the caricature and the truth of who and what we are is not an easy task. Because this task is a response to the way our culture seeks to define us, it is, at its essence, an act of true trans advocacy; which is to say, an act of true compassion.

The Lesbian feminist Audrey Lorde famously said, quote, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare." In this way, a more complicated answer, which is to say, a more honest answer is that as long as our culture seeks to destroy who we know ourselves to be, existence is synonymous with advocacy, which is synonymous with true compassion.

We cannot run from this primary work of activism by losing ourselves in the various social movements that are always in need of volunteers. That isn't true advocacy; in fact, it's an act of self-erasure. We must commit to doing our own emotional work; this is perhaps the most important political act any trans person can undertake. Above and beyond that, true trans advocacy means knowing that everyone can be compassionate in ways that are respectful of themselves and of their community. For some, that might look like helping to set up a trans support group. For others, it might look like being there for someone at 3 in the morning because that person really needs to talk to another who gets it. For others, it might look like lobbying, giving support to trans organizations, or just speaking up when they see injustice.

True trans advocacy is about being conscious of what we do; it's not about a blind reaction. It's not about hiding out in movements, neglecting the very things we must do to not only live, but thrive. Attending to the political work of doing what we must to ensure our continued existence in a world that seeks our eradication is the beating heart of trans advocacy. As a trans advocate, I encourage you to

listen closely to your heart.

Do you write about issues affecting the trans community?

Submit articles for publication on the TransAdvocate here.

Suggested citation

Cristan Williams. "Q&A: Taking a break from trans advocacy." TransAdvocate, March 4, 2018.
https://www.transadvocate.com/taking-a-break-from-trans-advocacy_n_22007.htm