

Sometimes it bewilders me that people don't understand the concept of allyship, and I remember feeling very fancy and philosophical over the summer of 2019 while sitting down and thinking, is this because of one of the greatest, most evolutionary tools of our time? Instagram.

Bear with me.

Allyship has become a conversation topic that is happening daily, if not hourly, dependent on who you follow and what your social feeds look like. It's a conversation that is so intrinsically linked to performance that I fear that often the motivation for allyship has shifted. We are now in a time of performative wokeness, in which the people around us are in constant fear, ensuring that they are saying and sharing and preaching the right things. Part of me wonders if these people are even doing the work themselves. We see people sharing and discussing such monumental social topics online so often that it often becomes a discussion around whether people are just discussing these topics for clout. Or worse, for followers. This is only a part of what I see online. Social media and the ways in which we can influence and discuss lived experience and the nuance of a marginalized existence to tens of thousands of people is something I am eternally grateful for. It's one of the best ways for me to not only share tips on allyship when I feel fit to, but to also be an ally to

the people around me. Sharing their work, uplifting their messages, ensuring people go to their shows, buying their work as independent queer businesses, and generally signposting people to other grassroots groups, or charities, that help us continue our education and growth. It's also a great opportunity for me to un-learn socialized behaviour. But that shouldn't be where it stops. That should be, if anything, a catalyst to do more, all the time. We all have lives to listen to, people to care for and groups that need us to be there for them. Just because we are marginalized does not mean that there are not other people suffering from the same dull weight above us all. Our identities aren't just tribes; they're interconnected. Weaving in and out of each other, rather beautifully, across communities and across continents.

Sharing pictures and words of queer people or people of colour or disabled people on your social media networks but still not actively doing anything in real life to ensure the spaces that we exist within are accessible is performative wokeness at its peak. It's the equivalent of being out for a meal and topping up only your glass of water when it's empty and not the person's you're with. It's self-serving.

But then who does it come down to to get people to be allies? Is it *our* job? Do we just wait for people to become allies? Is it a hybrid of the two?

Unfortunately we are in a time now in the UK especially where transphobic rhetoric and discussions targeting gender non-conforming and non-binary people are at an all-time high. TERF (trans exclusionary radical feminism) activity is a pandemic within our own community, and it's only getting stronger and more organized. The formation of the LGB Alliance in 2019 saw genuine terror and realization set into so many trans siblings of mine, as well as in me, at how vociferous these people are and are going to continue to be. The endorsement of their views and bile coming from national media means that their poisonous words are being validated, offering the trans people that these words affect nowhere to hide. Many of the UK's biggest and most prominent journalists and broadcasters, all the way down to our magical authors and shit comedians, are aligning themselves with this toxic group, all in the name of protecting the definition and rights of 'biology'.

The very notion of this 'debate', but also so often, our own literal existence, is not only transphobic but also another example of how binary the world we live in is. Aside from gender, we exist in a time where we are either right or wrong. It's yes or no. We are continually made to have to go back and forth, debating whether or not trans people are allowed to have access to basic necessities. To respect, and to kindness.

This potent debate that exists around transness is a movement that has blood on its hands. To deny existence is to act as if we never existed. To continually remove our rich history, and instead in its place, leave emptiness, and in that emptiness, lies and mistruths fill the gap, creating an image that was never true. Expungement from society. No records of our existence, because when it comes down to it, the people who are in charge don't want us to be here.

So who should be doing the work to allow us to be seen? Is it us, the experts on our existence? Or is it our allies, being able to help elevate our voices into spaces and environments that aren't always accessible to us? It's a conversation that seems to be going around in concentric circles, and truthfully, I still am unsure as to where I stand on the subject, specifically the movement towards the oppressed educating the oppressor. The conversation is moving in a way that is both allowing non-binary people to not have to constantly do the leg work, but is also meaning that cis people are failing to educate themselves because there's a lack of empathy or care behind their motivations to learn. It's a space for non-binary people to regain the power of telling and speaking their truth, but often at the expense of their mental health and for 'trauma porn' rather than real care. Social media is an outlet to get 'likes', rather than to actually encourage people

to stop and think and re-access their relationship with allyship. Again, it's performative wokeness. The motivation to educate and become an ally often doesn't come from witnessing and hearing the hardships of non-binary people but from wanting to ensure that you're 'ahead of the curve' and publicly and socially seen to be advocating for our rights to exist and, more than that, thrive. Hence why it then often falls back down to us. Or, it comes with trans people having to literally stand on stage, cry a bit, trawl through some of their most traumatic experiences on this planet, for a white middle-aged mum to maybe well up a little, and then decide that she should care a bit because her friend Susan's brother's stepson's child is trans.



5 THINGS I'D SAY TO PEOPLE WANTING TO BE AN ALLY

1. Check your privilege. Just because you're part of a marginalized community doesn't mean that you can't be an ally. Being queer doesn't mean that you're not complicit within other institutional power structures, such as racism, Islamophobia, ableism, anti-Semitism, etc.

2. Don't rely on the marginalized person to constantly be your educator. Unless you're paying that person, or that person or group has allowed themselves to dedicate time to the subject, don't just ask marginalized people how to treat them with kindness, empathy and compassion.
3. Educate yourself. Many non-binary people had to educate themselves through social media and online resources on the very notion and history of what being non-binary is, so the least that you can do is actively do the same as an ally. Read the books, find the online spaces and remember to not take up too much space as an ally in these communities.
4. De-centre yourself from the conversation. For example, as white people often our white fragility and lack of awareness when it comes to race can feel to some like an attack on you as a person. But knowing that this isn't about your feelings as a white person and is more about knowing how we are complicit within institutional racism, and more so how we can start the continual journey to ensuring that we stamp out and erase these practices in our day-to-day, is the most important thing we need to be doing.

5. Despite what a lot of people will tell you, it's okay to get things wrong. But it's not okay to continually be wrong. Being called out or told that what you've done is wrong, again, similarly to point four, isn't about you. It's not a time for you to whine about your feelings being hurt; it's a time when you need to accept you were wrong and continue about your life ensuring you don't make the same mistakes. Once is fine, twice is not.