

DAILY LIFE

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Trolling Charlotte Dawson

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Published: August 31, 2012 - 3:37PM

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“Never feed the trolls”. That’s what they tell you online if you try to shine a light on, or respond to, your online bullies. It was what many people told Charlotte Dawson this week as she highlighted the abuse she’d been subjected to by fellow Twitter users, evidently as punishment for the grave crime of calling New Zealand small.

In a move similar to last year’s [#mencallmethings](#) project, Dawson re-tweeted the bile spewed at her throughout the week, presumably in an effort to illustrate what internet bullying looks like.

Yesterday, Dawson was [hospitalised](#).

That being subjected to such treatment is considered, by many, par for the course for those in the public eye is a damning indictment of how far into the mire humanity has sunk.

I’m a huge fan of Dawson’s and always have been; both for her commitment to anti-bullying campaigns, and her no-nonsense persona. As a fellow depression-sufferer, I have always appreciated her frankness in [talking about](#) the illness in the face of a culture that is often loath to do so.

How awful, then, that the Twitter trolls used it as ammo against her in their witless tirade this week. That’s how they operate online: when calling you names and swearing at you doesn’t seem to be working anymore, they dig for “dirt”, for anything that might be used to break your spirit. They do it for the lulz, as the tale goes.

How many more times does a “Twitter storm” or “blogwar” have to reach this sort of conclusion for something to be done about it?

And what *can* be done about it? Defenders of internet freedom are circumspect (to say the least) about so-called “anti-trolling” laws and bills - such as [Arizona’s House Bill 2549](#) - given the difficulty in *defining* online harassment, not to mention policing it. But surely there’s a happy medium?

Depressingly, the broader, non-legislature response to trolling and internet bullying still seems to be “ignore it and it will go away”; “Don’t feed the trolls” is the empty phrase often rolled out in response to those who decide to speak out against their tormentors.

This is exacerbated in Australia, I think, by our tiresome dedication to the old “dobbers wear nappies” mindset, where responding to (or even pointing out) abuse of this sort somehow makes you the bad guy, the whining dobber who can’t just soldier on and cop it sweet.

In Dawson’s case, that has involved a choir of bright minds suggesting she should have just “switched off the internet” or “gone offline”. What a great idea, you guys! Who knew it were so easy?

A quick sample of tweets directed at Dawson in the past day includes such stellar advice as “She didnt have to read any of this, now that she has, she's getting all sorts of sympathy based on her somewhat fame“ from [Matthew Labarbera](#), and “[Dawson] is a fragile soul and has been feeding the trolls, she's not the one to fight the battle” from [Peter Ford](#). Thumbs up, guys, good one.

(Some of the champions airing their thoughts online also need to learn the difference between a talent show judge’s constructive criticism, and an online bully’s “criticism”, particularly as it was Dawson who [put Demelza Revely and her cohorts on blast](#) back in 2008 for [bullying](#) fellow *ANTM* contestants.)

Fortunately the unhelpful comments are outweighed by the kind, supportive sort, but it’s cold comfort.

That the “Charlotte Dawson vs the trolls” story climaxed in such a fashion is particularly galling for anyone who has been in a similar position - and why advice like “just turn off” is so unwelcome.

Some years ago - in the mid-to-late-’00s - I was one of a number of people targeted for abuse by a community of drongos known as The Spin Starts Here, masterminded by “Caz” and “The Hack”.

The Hack and Caz [turned out to be](#) two otherwise ordinary adults with jobs and families. It was an alarming insight into internet bile for anyone who thinks the typical troll looks like [this guy from South Park](#).

I took a keen interest in the unfolding story of their unmasking, since they and a few offsidiers (including a Melbourne-based “spin doctor” who posts as Ramon Insertnamehere) had turned their attention to me in the months leading up to the outing.

Supplied (by whom I still don’t know) with photos from my Facebook account, they whipped themselves into a frenzy, describing my “melty tits” and suggesting - numerous times - that I kill myself. Presumably because I was too “ugly” to live.

(They then turned their attention to my family, lampooning my mother’s writing, in addition to calling her a pedophile, and her then-partner “retarded”.)

Adults, remember, with real jobs and functional lives.

It’s a good thing I was already seeing a therapist at the time, because the onslaught took its toll on me. Worse, I blamed myself. “Well, I’m in the public eye”, I’d say, as though the crime of having been published on the opinion page a few times warranted such sprays. I’ve dealt with real life stalkers (again, thanks to my questionable status as a public figure) who were more reasonable than these online creeps.

The thing about assholes like Caz, The Hack, Ramon, and any of those who laid into Dawson, is that they’d probably laugh to read that. Shortly after Caz and The Hack were outed, I was asked to write a piece about it for *The Walkley Magazine*. The article was never posted online, but Ramon’s response to it can still be read [in full](#).

Since then, much to his dismay I’m sure, I’ve kept writing. The whiners and hatemongers - such as a fellow [who thinks I smell like a used sanitary pad](#), [amongst other concerns he has about me](#) - have dropped their discussion of me to a low rumble. They tend to hang out in the same places online and like to egg each other on when the occasion presents itself; here they are, [merrily favouriting a typical tweet about me](#).

It’s easier to deal with these sorts since they’re so hopelessly boring; you know you’ve [seen some shit](#) when you find your current variety of “haters” much more

tolerable than the old lot. And at the very least, it's nicer to have my writing criticised than my "melty tits", isn't it? (In fact, go ahead and criticise *my work* as much as you like - that's something else altogether.

My experience is unquestionably at the 'small fry' end of the scale; Dawson's, given her much higher profile, is at the other.

But it never really stops hurting; dredging up some of 2008's greatest hits while writing this was enough to give me the shakes. You just develop a sort of callus, a husk from within which you can attempt to laugh at it and move forward, if not on.

It's *so easy* for the peanut gallery to say "don't let it get to you"; the terrible tragedy of this situation is that Dawson is perceived to be the "weak" one because she broke first. Au contraire: the strength it takes to endure the trolls, the bullies and the haters is immense. To stand up to them, even more so.

May she come back stronger than ever.

Support is available for anyone who may be distressed by phoning Lifeline 13 11 14; Mensline 1300 789 978; Kids Helpline 1800 551 800.

This story was found at: <http://www.dailylife.com.au/news-and-views/dl-opinion/trolling-charlotte-dawson-20120830-252wa.html>