

## **A Response to the Hateful Comments on my Renter's Ad**

By Cole Goodwin

Edit May 11th, 2022:

This post is going all kinds of sideways so I will probably take it down soon but I wanted to address a few things first:

Apparently nobody told John Grant, Brent Sells, Ethan Taylor, Paul Miller, and Camille Gallegey of The Dalles Happenings about the law, sciences and our cultures' updated take on gender.

If you're reading this: Hi John! Hi Brent! HI Ethan! Hi Paul! Hi Camille!

I probably should just ignore you but I can't help but feel like we're connected across space and time thanks to your unkind comments. I know you just want attention and don't even really care about being a bully towards me so no hard feelings and you're welcome for the attention. Honestly as a journalist I have developed such a thick skin that your words don't really phase me. But just in case you have any interest in learning the facts about gender and sexuality I wanted to give you the opportunity to follow this link to see modern science's updated take on sex and gender:

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/stop-using-phony-science-to-justify-transphobia/>

Don't want to read?

Hey I get it!

You've got comments to make and comments to respond to! You're busy! You've got moderators to keep busy to! (Moderators do you ever fantasize about how much time it would save you to just ban them from the group?) The point is I get that you're busy people who can't be expected to read something you don't want to so I'll save you some time, the cliff notes version is this: the science is clear and conclusive that sex is not binary and transgender people are real.

Don't believe in science?

Try this on for size: Do you have faith or intuition?

Faith and intuition are a kind of "knowing" or "believing" that isn't based in fact or science. Yet these two modes of connection and communication are common to a diverse range of

people and span across multiple belief systems. Need an example? Okay. I knew when my cat died. I just knew. She had been my constant companion for 18 years. And I couldn't tell you how I knew she had died. I just did. Need another example? There are countless stories of mother's just knowing the moment their child dies, or just knowing that their child is in danger. Just start googling.

How did she know? Who knows! Call it intuition, call it a sixth sense, call it a gut feeling, call it self awareness, or connection to a higher self, call it a message from God, call it a miracle—honestly, just call it whatever you want because science can't explain it. (Yet.) And although the inner workings and why's of how such knowing is possible are still unknown, it doesn't change that woman's experience of knowing her child had died or was in danger.

Gender can be like that too, an unexplainable knowing. Sure, my rural primary care doctor might not be able to tell me why I'm in a gender expansive category or why exactly I don't fit neatly into the man/woman binary. But it doesn't stop that from being the reality of my experience. How do I know my gender? I just know. No need to overthink it.

Still not getting it?

Ask yourself this: if you had no way of perceiving your body, or anyone else's interpretation of your identity, like say, you could only exist inside your own head and were totally blind, deaf, immobile etc, how would you know who you were? You'd just kind of know it right?

Hey John and Brent, are you still reading? What about you Ethan and Edwin? If those are even your real names. You reading this? Listen, I can see you're confused about sex and gender and I want to help.

Here's a useful tool:

Write yourself a letter explaining how you came to know your gender.

Was it because somebody told you who you were? Or because you just know?

Or maybe you didn't just know who you were and that's okay to!

Maybe you had to try out a few things before you figured it out. And that's fine. Identity is allowed to shift my friend. One day you might identify yourself as a roofer, the next year you might be a plumber, the year after that you might be a CEO, and the year after that you might be a farmer. Being different than you were before isn't a bad thing, it's just a natural consequence of the passage of time and growing and changing as a person.

Still confused?

Try thinking about gender like a pair of jeans:

Maybe on day one of your life you tried on the gender you were assigned at birth and it just fit perfectly.

And if that's the case then who-ee aren't you lucky!

Or maybe you had to go through a few pairs of jeans before one finally found the one that fit just right. Heck, maybe you had to try on a hundred pairs of jeans before you found one that fit.

Or maybe you decided that jeans suck and opted for a skirt or kilt instead.

Identity is fluid, sure you're born a baby, but you don't stay that way do you?

But I see you, John, and I see that you seem to think identity doesn't change. Well that doesn't seem very accurate. But if you want to identify as a man-baby for your whole life have at it. Personally I like my situation of having been a baby, a pre-teen, a teenager, and then growing up, a lot better... but to each their own.

See what I did there? Hey I'm not trying to be mean, I'm just saying man...do you identify as a baby? No. Then you've changed your identity since you were born haven't you.

People can identify themselves as roofers or plumbers one year and be a farmer the next, and that is just fine. Our identities change based on the choices we make, the experiences we have, and the way we view ourselves. And it's the same with gender, gender expression like identity is a fluid thing, not everyone flows the same, and some look more like ponds than rivers, but even the most stubborn pond ripples when the winds come.

The point is, whatever your journey to your perfect gender fit looks like it is absolutely fine. But it's also important to understand and respect that the journey- much like the journey of finding jeans that fit- isn't going to look the same for everyone-because not everyone is shaped the same, inside or out.

And finally ask yourself: which one of these ways of being seems like a more honest, authentic, and integrity based way to define your identity?

1. Someone told you who you are and prescribed you an identity without even knowing you, and then told you to conform to that identity without question and then you conform to the identity that's been prescribed to you by a total stranger in a comment on The Dalles Happening until you die....or
2. Someone just actually knowing and being and expressing and experimenting with who they are and fine tuning it until they figure out what feels like the most true and enjoyable version of themselves regardless of what other people think.

And finally, since some of you are having fun misgendering me in the comments.

If you need to experience something yourself in order to be able to experience empathy around it, here's a little taste of what it feels like to be misgendered:

Hey Edwina Smith, how's your day going? Looks like you're having fun on my post. Hey, I wanted to talk to you for a second. Cause it looks like you're a bit confused. So I want you to put yourself in my shoes for a second, listen I know it's hard. Trolls on the internet consistently score low on empathy so I'm sure this might be tough for you but let's just try it for a second. Let's pretend I'm you and you're me. I don't even know you, but I've decided that I know your gender better than you do. So I'm gong to start calling you 'she' and 'her' and calling you Edwina instead of Edwin.

I saw your housing post saying: "old conservative guy, seeks room for rent" and so I went on Facebook and I commented on your post with: "Well I hope Edwina finds her dream home."

Now how does that sit with you? How does that come across to you? I bet it comes across as incorrect, disorienting, aggressive and disrespectful and also pretty ridiculous because I've decided that I know you better than you know yourself. And you know yourself to be a man. So sure Edwina, you can call me 'she or her' and sure I can't stop you. Just like you can't stop me from calling you Edwina right now. But you'll still be incorrect. And I'll still be incorrect.

This shit is literally ridiculous. It's like calling a table a lamp. They're both furniture but they're pretty different experiences. So sure, you can call me 'she' but you'll sound ridiculous and you'll also be wrong because I'm not a 'she' I'm a 'they'.

Still don't get it? How to explain...Hmmm walk with me for a minute. Imagine a slightly different world where everyday you walked through life and people told you that you were not a man and you just must be imagining it. That there is no such thing as a man, you must of made it up or be part of some kind of man 'trend.' Imagine if everyday people asked you to justify your existence as a 'man' and told you that being a 'man' was fake. It wouldn't make your experience as a masculine person any less valid, because no one can take away who you really are...you'll still be who you are regardless, but it would make daily interactions and simple tasks like looking for a place to live turn into a chore.

Let's go back to the housing post, for example, imagine you post: "conservative old guy seeks room for rent" and within hours responses start flooding in saying: "Being a man is not real. She's obviously a woman. Get over yourself Edwina with all that being a man nonsense. The Goddess says men are fake. There is no such thing as men. Stop trying to be special Edwina. If you lived with me I would call you she because there is no such thing as a man and you can't expect me to participate in that masculine pronoun nonsense."

You probably wouldn't like that and you'd probably feel like you didn't deserve that response. You're just looking for a rental, not trying to stir up trouble by just being honest about who you are. You wouldn't want to live in a house where everyone disrespected your existence and misgendered you everyday. You wouldn't want to live in a house where you had to explain and defend your existence to all your housemates. You'd just want to be able to exist in peace and get a reprieve from the outside world misgendering you day-in and day-out. You would want to be able to come home and just be yourself and relax without having to be on the defensive. And you'd be scratching your head the whole time going: being a man is real! I know it is! Because I am a man!

And guess what? Being a man is real! And being non-binary is real! The science is conclusive: gender is a spectrum and cisgender, transgender and non-binary people are all real!

So listen Edwin, John, Ethan and Brent: I know who I am and all the bullies in the world can't change that. And if you and the people you surround yourself with disagree with that and think that you can know who I am better than I do, that's just a delusion. Because you can never really know what is going on inside of another person. And you can never truly fully experience what another person's experience of life and gender are. You can only really know yourself. And your perceptions of others don't actually change who other people are. People just are who they are.

Even if I call you Ma'am or lady, or Edwina, Johna, Bri, or Ethel you still know are who you are: Edwin Smith, John, Brent, and Ethan he/him. Just as I know who I am: Cole Goodwin they/them.

So, my advice to stop looking and acting like a fool is: get a therapist who can teach you how to address the projections you put on to others and in the meantime keep your projections to yourself and stop trying to exert your fear, control, and your incomplete interpretations of gender, science, and religion on to other people's lives.

Also please know that you can be better than this.

Every moment is a choice we make. And every moment is a chance to make a new choice about our behavior, our identity, and where to spend our energy. And sure, we're all imperfect but we can get better by practicing boundaries, self awareness, empathy, and in your case: avoiding trolling and bullying behaviors on the internet. For you that might be a hard habit to break, you may even be as addicted to it as some people are addicted to alcohol or drugs-but you can overcome it. It just takes practice.

Maybe start practicing by posting something nice, honest, and kind- or heck even something vulnerable-for a change and see how that makes you feel. I bet it will feel great, because even if no one likes it, even if no one gives you that thrilling feeling of being the center of attention by responding-you'll have put something actually worthwhile into the world and you won't need anyone's response to know that you've done something good and that you can be proud of yourself for that.

Just keep practicing that and then maybe the next time someone is looking for a rental or help on the interweb you'll be able to just let that person go about their day and let the community try to support that person without giving in to your urge to drag them through the mud.