TRANSADVOCATE

Will the real Brennan please stand up?

By Cristan Williams

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Abstract

Will the real Brennan please stand up? Many trans folk are aware of Brennan for her attempts to overturn trans equality protections, her targeting, outing and trans-shaming of non-cis folk and for claiming that cis privilege doesn't exist because not all butch lesbians can access all the privilege that comes from not being trans. About [...]

Article

Will the real Brennan please stand up?

Many trans folk are aware of Brennan for her attempts to overturn trans equality protections, her targeting, outing and trans-shaming of non-cis folk and for claiming that cis privilege doesn't exist because not all butch lesbians can access all the privilege that comes from not being trans.

About a month ago, Brennan began contacting me. She sent me her personal phone number and email saying that should I ever have questions, I should feel free to contact her. I did contact her. We played telephone tag, sent texts and when at last I had a firm commitment for a scheduled phone call, she apparently ignored my call. Since I couldn't get her on the phone, 10 days ago I sent her an email with the questions I had for her and thus far she's ignored them. Moreover, while I was waiting for her to make good on her offer to answer some questions, she apparently contacted a MRA site and asked to be a contributing author on their site.

Yes. Cathy Brennan: MRA activist. But, I'll get to that in a moment. First, here's the evidence to back up my previous paragraph, along with the questions Brennan appears to be ducking:

Figure 1. 5/6/2013: Brennan extends invitation.

I called her the next day. Here's an example of the telephone tag that went on for days:

Here's some of the texts back and forth:

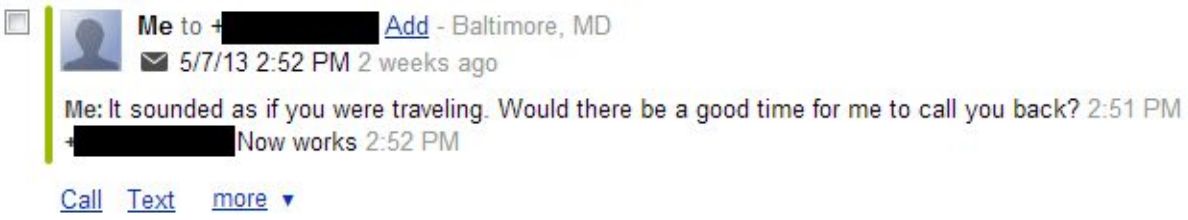


Figure 2. text1

Figure 3. text2

Here are the emails:

Cristan Williams <cristan@[illegible]> May 15 (12 days ago)
to bugbrennan

Cathy -

Would you like to schedule a time for a call tomorrow? It seems that without an appointment, we're to be able to connect on the phone. I have meetings all afternoon today and you indicated that you're not available in the evenings.

Alternatively, since you've indicated that you're open to me emailing you, I'd be happy to converse v well. Please let me know which is most convenient for you.

Thanks!

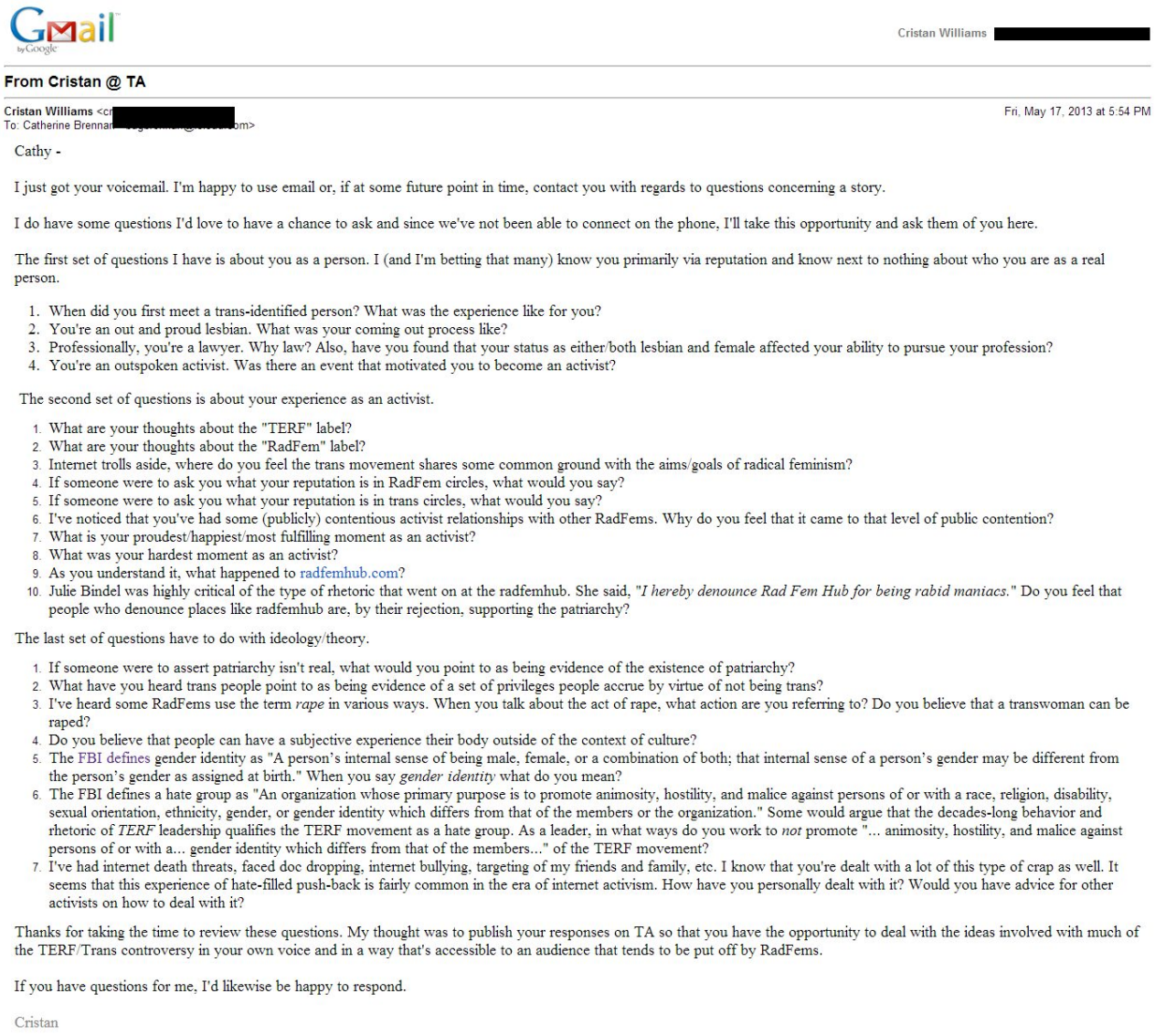
Cristan

Catherine Brennan May 15 (12 days ago)
to Cristan

Tomorrow works.

Cathy Brennan

Figure 4. CB-emails



Gmail by Google

Cristan Williams [redacted]

From Cristan @ TA

Cristan Williams <cr[redacted]
To: Catherine Brennan[redacted]om>

Fri, May 17, 2013 at 5:54 PM

Cathy -

I just got your voicemail. I'm happy to use email or, if at some future point in time, contact you with regards to questions concerning a story.

I do have some questions I'd love to have a chance to ask and since we've not been able to connect on the phone, I'll take this opportunity and ask them of you here.

The first set of questions I have is about you as a person. I (and I'm betting that many) know you primarily via reputation and know next to nothing about who you are as a real person.

1. When did you first meet a trans-identified person? What was the experience like for you?
2. You're an out and proud lesbian. What was your coming out process like?
3. Professionally, you're a lawyer. Why law? Also, have you found that your status as either/both lesbian and female affected your ability to pursue your profession?
4. You're an outspoken activist. Was there an event that motivated you to become an activist?

The second set of questions is about your experience as an activist.

1. What are your thoughts about the "TERF" label?
2. What are your thoughts about the "RadFem" label?
3. Internet trolls aside, where do you feel the trans movement shares some common ground with the aims/goals of radical feminism?
4. If someone were to ask you what your reputation is in RadFem circles, what would you say?
5. If someone were to ask you what your reputation is in trans circles, what would you say?
6. I've noticed that you've had some (publicly) contentious activist relationships with other RadFems. Why do you feel that it came to that level of public contention?
7. What is your proudest/happiest/most fulfilling moment as an activist?
8. What was your hardest moment as an activist?
9. As you understand it, what happened to radfemhub.com?
10. Julie Bindel was highly critical of the type of rhetoric that went on at the radfemhub. She said, "*I hereby denounce Rad Fem Hub for being rabid maniacs.*" Do you feel that people who denounce places like radfemhub are, by their rejection, supporting the patriarchy?

The last set of questions have to do with ideology/theory.

1. If someone were to assert patriarchy isn't real, what would you point to as being evidence of the existence of patriarchy?
2. What have you heard trans people point to as being evidence of a set of privileges people accrue by virtue of not being trans?
3. I've heard some RadFems use the term *rape* in various ways. When you talk about the act of rape, what action are you referring to? Do you believe that a transwoman can be raped?
4. Do you believe that people can have a subjective experience their body outside of the context of culture?
5. The FBI defines gender identity as "A person's internal sense of being male, female, or a combination of both; that internal sense of a person's gender may be different from the person's gender as assigned at birth." When you say *gender identity* what do you mean?
6. The FBI defines a hate group as "An organization whose primary purpose is to promote animosity, hostility, and malice against persons of or with a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity which differs from that of the members or the organization." Some would argue that the decades-long behavior and rhetoric of *TERF* leadership qualifies the TERF movement as a hate group. As a leader, in what ways do you work to *not* promote "... animosity, hostility, and malice against persons of or with a... gender identity which differs from that of the members..." of the TERF movement?
7. I've had internet death threats, faced doc dropping, internet bullying, targeting of my friends and family, etc. I know that you're dealt with a lot of this type of crap as well. It seems that this experience of hate-filled push-back is fairly common in the era of internet activism. How have you personally dealt with it? Would you have advice for other activists on how to deal with it?

Thanks for taking the time to review these questions. My thought was to publish your responses on TA so that you have the opportunity to deal with the ideas involved with much of the TERF/Trans controversy in your own voice and in a way that's accessible to an audience that tends to be put off by RadFems.

If you have questions for me, I'd likewise be happy to respond.

Cristan

Figure 5. Gmail---From-Cristan-@-TA

After all of this, we still hadn't managed to actually talk. After more than a week of unsuccessfully trying to connect, I sent her the following email:

Here are the questions Cathy Brennan apparently will not answer:

> *The first set of questions I have is about you as a person. I (and I'm betting that many) know you primarily via reputation and know next to nothing about who you are as a real person.*
> *When did you first meet a trans-identified person? What was the experience like for you?*
> *You're an out and proud lesbian. What was your coming out process like?*
> *Professionally, you're a lawyer. Why law? Also, have you found that your status as either/both lesbian and female affected your ability to pursue your profession?*
> *You're an outspoken activist. Was there an event that motivated you to become an activist?*
> *The second set of questions is about your experience as an activist.*
> *What are your thoughts about the "TERF" label?*

What are your thoughts about the "RadFem" label?
Internet trolls aside, where do you feel the trans movement shares some common ground with the aims/goals of radical feminism?
If someone were to ask you what your reputation is in RadFem circles, what would you say?
If someone were to ask you what your reputation is in trans circles, what would you say?
I've noticed that you've had some (publicly) contentious activist relationships with other RadFems. Why do you feel that it came to that level of public contention?
What is your proudest/happiest/most fulfilling moment as an activist?
What was your hardest moment as an activist?
As you understand it, what happened to radfemhub.com?
Julie Bindel was highly critical of the type of rhetoric that went on at the radfemhub. She said, "I hereby denounce Rad Fem Hub for being rabid maniacs." Do you feel that people who denounce places like radfemhub are, by their rejection, supporting the patriarchy?
The last set of questions have to do with ideology/theory.
If someone were to assert patriarchy isn't real, what would you point to as being evidence of the existence of patriarchy?
What have you heard trans people point to as being evidence of a set of privileges people accrue by virtue of not being trans?
I've heard some RadFems use the term rape in various ways. When you talk about the act of rape, what action are you referring to? Do you believe that a transwoman can be raped?
Do you believe that people can have a subjective experience their body outside of the context of culture?
The FBI defines gender identity as "A person's internal sense of being male, female, or a combination of both; that internal sense of a person's gender may be different from the person's gender as assigned at birth." When you say gender identity what do you mean?
The FBI defines a hate group as "An organization whose primary purpose is to promote animosity, hostility, and malice against persons of or with a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity which differs from that of the members or the organization." Some would argue that the decades-long behavior and rhetoric of TERF leadership qualifies the TERF movement as a hate group. As a leader, in what ways do you work to not promote "... animosity, hostility, and malice against persons of or with a... gender identity which differs from that of the members..." of the TERF movement?
I've had internet death threats, faced doc dropping, internet bullying, targeting of my friends and family, etc. I know that you're dealt with a lot of this type of crap as well. It seems that this experience of hate-filled push-back is fairly common in the era of internet activism. How have you personally dealt with it? Would you have advice for other activists on how to deal with it?

After getting nothing but silence from Brennan after her apparent willingness to answer questions, I set her a follow-up email:

Cristan Williams <cristan@[redacted]n> May 22 (5 days ago)
to Catherine

Just following up.

I'd not received any response to the questions, so I wasn't sure that you had gotten them.

Thanks!

Figure 6. Hello? Echo-o-o-o

While I've not heard from Brennan, the MRAs have.

Apparently while I was busy waiting for a reply from Brennan, she was busy putting herself out there to support the MRA movement. Here's the email Brennan apparently sent to someone named Loy Finly over at avoiceformen.com:

> *of the Radfem Hub variety. I am not kidding. There is no punch line here. I really got the email. And of all things, she wanted to write an article for AVFM. Rather than try to make sense of that, I will just share the email with you.*
>
> > *Name: Cathy Brennan*
> >
> > *Email: [redacted]*
> >
> > *Message: Hi,*
> >
> > *My name is Cathy Brennan. I run a blog (http://pretendbians.com/author/bugbrennan/) about how some men are hurting other men through so - called "trans activism". I would be interested in writing a guest article. Please get back to me.*
>
> *Now, while I was deeply touched by Bug Brennan's compassion and concern for men being hurt, giving her nasty ass a platform to spread hate at AVFM is still not quite on my daily "to do" list.*

Figure 7. Hi. I'm Cathy "Bug" Brennan and I want to support the Men's Rights Movement.

I will say that the email listed on the above email is the exact email Brennan used when corresponding with me.

Brennan's support of the Men's Rights Movement is kinda ironic since she tweeted the following earlier this year:

Figure 8. More from the SPLC's voice of reason on MRA issues

Apparently around the same time that she seems to have decided to support the MRA movement, she changed many of her accounts so that they are not longer publicly available:

Figure 9. Brannan's personal site is no longer public

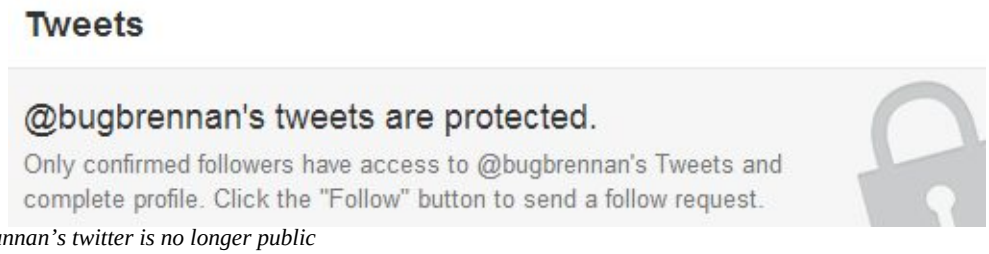


Figure 10. Brannan's twitter is no longer public

I've no idea what's going on with Brennan. Obviously she wants her privacy. Obviously she wants to work with MRAs. At the end of the day, I don't personally care what what's going on with her. I don't care if she chooses to side with MRAs, TERFs or some other fringe group.

The point of putting all of this out there is to prove that I've made a good faith effort to take Cathy up on her offer of dialogue. My questions to her will remain open to her. Should Cathy choose to be honest about her claim that she's open to dialogue, I'd be happy to talk about the questions I've laid out as they're central to the ideology that Brennan, in particular, has worked to so hard to support.

Cross-posted from Ehipassiko

UPDATE: BRENNAN RESPONDS

Suggested citation

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