

#TERFweek: The Changed Language But Consistent Viewpoint Of MichFest's Lisa Vogel

By Autumn Sandeen

Published August 14, 2014 | Updated March 31, 2026

https://www.transadvocate.com/terfweek-the-changed-language-but-consistent-viewpoint-of-michfests-lisa-vogel_n_14212.htm

Abstract

This is a long-form article on MichFest's co-founder and current producer Lisa Vogel. The article contains extensive text of what Vogel has stated regarding trans people over several decades, as well as analysis and commentary on her carefully evolved language, but unevolved perspective, that trans women are males. Lisa Vogel, a co-founder and the producer [...]

Article

This is a long-form article on MichFest's co-founder and current producer Lisa Vogel. The article contains extensive text of what Vogel has stated regarding trans people over several decades, as well as analysis and commentary on her carefully evolved language, but unevolved perspective, that trans women are males.

Lisa Vogel, a co-founder and the producer of the Michigan Women's Music Festival (known more commonly as MichFest and by the acronym MWMF), has consistently defined trans women as both men and male in decades past, but her phrasing to describe this point of view over the past twenty-three years has softened and changed. This August 1st she's stated that she believes trans women as womyn -- something she shifted to in her statements since 2006 -- but in that shift, she's careful since then not referred to trans women as female. It's the same rhetorical device that Cathy Brennan was using in 2011 to separate trans women from cis women.

Over decades, Vogel has called for a radical discussion about the womyn-born-womyn policy with no apparent intent to ever change the policy (that she now refers to only as an intent) -- she holds out false hope to trans people that she one day won't embrace trans-exclusionary radical feminism.

Vogel stated her intent never to change her intent for MichFest to be trans exclusionary most clearly in a MichFest August 24, 1999 press release.

We are aware that some individuals associated with Camp Trans have not respected the Land as womyn's space. We know that many of you are angry about this, and have questions about whether this is a change of festival policy. There is no change in Festival policy, politics or intention regarding womyn's space. We too are angry that this has been disrespected, and we are dealing with it now the best we can. We want you to know that we always have been and always will be committed to the Festival as womyn's space.

MEDIA RELEASE: August 24, 1999
CONTACT: Lisa Vogel

FESTIVAL REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO WOMYN-BORN SPACE

The 24th annual Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, held August 19 - 19th, brought more than 3,000 womyn and children together for an inspiring, rejuvenating week of performances, workshops, and community. This year's Festival was also the site of an action organized by the group Transsexual Menace.

When WWTMC, the organizers of the Festival, learned that Transsexual Menace planned to hold a "Son of Camp Trans" event across the road from the Festival grounds, producer Lisa Vogel issued the following statement:

"We do not and will not question any individual's gender. The Festival is an event organized by, for and about womyn. Our intention is for the Festival to be for womyn-born womyn, meaning people who were born and have lived their entire life experience as female. We ask that the transsexual community support and respect the intention of our event."

On Friday, August 19th, six individuals and a group of supporters from "Son of Camp Trans" approached the Box Office and requested tickets to enter the Festival. They proceeded with the full knowledge of the intent of the Festival to be a women born women space. In keeping with Festival values that no woman's gender ever be questioned on the Land, the Box Office workers did not question anyone's gender, and sold tickets to the six individuals when requested. These individuals then entered the Festival.

"As community organizers, we operate from a position of trust, expecting that people will try to do the right thing, rather than getting people to catch them doing the wrong thing," Lisa Vogel. "We do not and will not question any individual's gender. We hoped that the Transsexual Menace organizers would honor that trust and respect the intention of this event."

The Son of Camp Trans activists proceeded from the Front Gate Box Office to the outdoor communal showers in the RV camping area. They took off their clothes and it was apparent to the womyn in and near the showers that two of the Son of Camp Trans activists were anatomically male. The word began to spread that there were men on the land who had shown their penises in the showers. A member of the Son of Camp Trans group slipped by the teenage girls' discussion group at the Community Center and engaged in explicit discussion about the ideal aspect of sex change operations. The group later began selling Transsexual Menace t-shirts outside the Main Kitchen area, attracting attention and complaints from patrons and vendors outside of the Crafts Bazaar is not permitted out of respect to the crafts-womyn who go through a selection process.

As the Son of Camp Trans activists made their way through the site, increasing numbers of Festival participants became aware of and expressed concern about these actions. Festival organizers focused on name control and safety of everyone involved. The Community Center, Camp peer counseling area, Staff Services and Security/Communications crews all worked hard to ensure the flow of accurate information and provide constructive opportunities for the expression of the full range of thoughts and feelings generated by these events.

A number of spontaneous gatherings developed where participants discussed and debated the presence of the Son of Camp Trans activists and their actions. Volunteer facilitators helped to structure discussions so that various viewpoints, including those of the Son of Camp Trans, could be heard. The Son of Camp Trans activists scheduled a workshop session for Saturday at noon in the workshop area, and various Festival participants announced their intention to hold community meetings at different locations on Saturday.

In response to confusion and concerns among Festival participants, organizers distributed 2,000 copies of the following statement on Friday evening, August 19:

Festival Update on "Son of Camp Trans"

There has been an event called "Son of Camp Trans" organized across the gate from the Land to protest the Festival as an event organized by, for and about womyn born womyn only.

The Festival is womyn's space, something that is rare and precious to most of us. We also define that further as women born women space, meaning a place for people who were born and have lived their entire life experience as female. This is our public statement to the Camp Trans-Organizers, and we asked that they, and other members of the Transsexual community, respect those wishes.

We are aware that some individuals associated with Camp Trans have not respected the Land as womyn's space. We know that many of you are angry about this, and have questions about whether this is a change of festival policy. There is

Figure 1. Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Reaffirms Commitment To Womyn-Born Space (August 24, 1999 Media Release)

And at that point, she clearly stated that she didn't believe trans women/womyn are womyn. In response to six trans women from the Transexual Menace/Camp Trans entering through the gates and attending the festival, the 1999 press release -- to which Lisa Vogel was listed as the point of contact -- stated this in a paragraph about the trans attendees:

In response to the presence of men on the land, several Festival participants chose to leave the Festival earlier than planned. Others expressed appreciation dismay that Festival organizers had not done more to prevent men from entering the Festival. Others voiced support for changing the womyn-born womyn intention. Many expressed appreciation for the statement issued by organizers and the way the events had been handled.

This isn't the first time Lisa Vogel had signed onto a document that referred to trans women with misgendering. She was, in 1977, one of the signatories of a letter sent to Olivia Records -- printed in the June issue of the publication Sister, stating Olivia Records needed to fire Sandy Stone (emphasis added).

We are writing concerning your decision to employ Sandy Stone (formerly _____) as your recording engineer and sound technician. We feel that it was and is irresponsible of you to have presented this person as a woman to the women's community when in fact he is a post-operative transsexual.

Sister June 1977 issue
(Published Letter)

Dear Olivia:

We are writing concerning your decision to employ Sandy Stone (formerly ██████████) as your recording engineer and sound technician. We feel that it was and is irresponsible of you to have promoted one person as a woman to the women's community when in fact he is a post-operative transsexual. The decision to work with a transsexual is one issue in itself, but the omission of this information from the public of women who support you was an unwise choice.

We feel that it was disgraceful not to share this process with the women's community. Many women give you their financial support primarily because they told you to work with women exclusively, and you are not being accountable to these women.

As performers, sound technicians, radio women, producers, and managers - women who put most of our energy and commitment into the field of women's culture - we are particularly concerned because of the effect this has on us. We were told that Stone was going to be doing sound at an upcoming concert billed as a women-only event. This seemed an odd choice, since there are more than a few competent women sound technicians in the Bay Area. In this instance a transsexual was being work away from women who have to struggle to gain access to these skills and whose opportunities are extremely limited.

Given the narrow options available to us, it is also likely that many of us would have to work with Stone. Some of us have already done so without the knowledge that this person was not a woman. After we did discover the truth about Stone and tried to discuss this with you, we were told that you considered him very much a woman, a lesbian, and that you trusted him more than middle class, heterosexual women. This was very painful to hear and indicated a great lack of respect and love for women and our struggle.

We do not believe that a man without a penis is a woman any more than we would accept a white woman with dyed skin as a Black woman. Sandy Stone grew up as a white male in this culture, with all the privileges and attitudes that that insures [sic]. It was his white male privilege that gave him access to the recording studio and the opportunity to gain engineering practice in the first place. He has never had to suffer the discrimination, self-hatred or fear that a woman must endure and survive in her life. And he cannot possess the special courage, brilliance, sensitivity and compassion that derives from that experience. How can we share feelings of sisterhood and solidarity with someone who has not had a woman's experience?

We are aware of the unfortunate necessity to call upon male knowledge or skills on occasion, because women have been excluded from certain fields. But we would like to trust that it is only used as a last resort, when there are no women available to do the job, and that it is done humbly - not as a hushed-up secret.

It is not our intention to discredit or trash Olivia. We request that you publish a statement on this issue, and hope that you are open to further discussion so that we might reach agreement on this difficult problem.

In Sisterhood,

G.A. 'G'14' Oliveira	Melissa Gorman
Evan Platon	Julianne Barry
Sally Pano	Scottie Smith
Geoff Sagers	Alia Dinkin
Lana Silkenmeyer	Deanne Eisenstadt
Ruth Stovell	Maxine Feldman
Pat Tuckey	Rae Hyde
Karla Tonnelle	Bonnie Lindahl
Fiona Tronchetti	Margie McPherson
Lisa Vogel	Jean Meelin
Sharon Wendstone	Crisa Mountmason

Figure 2. Letter to Olivia Records demanding that Sandy Stone be fired, as printed in the June 1977 issue of Sister (Lisa Vogel Signature Highlighted and Sandy Stone's previous name redacted)

That same letter also contained this paragraph:

We do not believe that a man without a penis is a woman any more than we would accept a white woman with dyed skin as a Black woman. Sandy Stone grew up as a white male in this culture, with all the privileges and attitudes that that insures [sic]. It was his white male privilege that gave him access to the recording studio and the opportunity to gain engineering practice in the first place. He has never had to suffer the discrimination, self-hatred or fear that a woman must endure and survive in her life. And he cannot possess the special courage, brilliance, sensitivity and compassion that derives from that experience. How can we share feelings of sisterhood and solidarity with someone who has not had a woman's experience?

The rhetorical comparison of women of color's experience and womyn-born-womyn's experience should be noted: in evolving forms, it's been a reoccurring talking point in many of Vogel's statements over many years.

In 1991, MichFest blocked Nancy Burkholder from attending MichFest. Co-producers of MichFest, Lisa Vogel and Barbara Price, signed a letter that was published in Gay Community News (GCN, a newspaper in Boston) where they discussed what happened from their perspective. In the letter they stated:

In the simplest of terms, the Michigan Festival is and always has been an event for womyn, and this continues to be defined as womyn born womyn. We respect everyone's right to define themselves as they wish.

Text from GCN, in the Nov. 10-16, 1991 issue

Festival womyn speak out

Some letters have been printed in the press in recent weeks regarding the womyn-only policy at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival as it relates to transsexuals participating in the event. We would like to clarify our policy and explain the circumstances which brought it to light this last August.

In the simplest of terms, the Michigan Festival is and always has been an event for womyn, and this continues to be defined as womyn born womyn. We respect everyone's right to define themselves as they wish.

It's unfortunate that our choice to offer the Michigan Festival as an event for womyn-born-womyn is being construed by some as a position on the merits of people making individual choices on how to live. We only mean to define who this event is for. We hold dearly our right to make this determination and in the same regard we believe that is the right of every other womyn's institution and community to define these issues depending on their own particular needs and concerns.

We regret that the circumstances of this year's festival may have been a result of a lack of current public information on this policy. We think it is understandable that our priority would not be centered around who our event is "not" for, and we have deliberately refrained from placing our focus in that direction, though we have always been definite about our policy when asked.

When it was clear this summer there was a known transsexual man attending the event, the festival security staff dealt with it as respectfully as possible. We provided local housing at our expense, offered return airport transportation, and refunded the festival ticket. Though the letter to the press represents Festival security considerations have been represented in a derogatory manner, these womyn took much time and care to make sure this difficult situation was dealt with as considerately as possible.

It may be valuable to know that the Festival working community processed this issue in meetings after the event, and it is clear from these discussions that the group of womyn who came together to create this gathering supports the festival policy. Though everyone was passionate about the issue and held strong feelings for all sides of the experience, it still was the overwhelming consensus that the intention of the Festival remains an event provided for womyn only.

In the bigger picture of "Michigan," we feel very good about this 10th Festival, and we are back to work making plans for the 1992 Festival. Our primary commitment is to keep our focus and energy on womyn and on presenting the best work of womyn's culture and community that we know how to create.

Lisa Vogel
Barbara Price
Producers, Michigan
Womyn's Music Festival
Villavieja, Mich.

Figure 3. Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Womyn Speak Out (Co-producers Lisa Vogel and Barbara Price; GCN, November 10-16, 1991 issue)

It's very clear here: Lisa Vogel specifically excluded trans women in her definition of womyn. But that isn't all that's in this letter. A few paragraphs down Vogel and her co-producer intentionally misgendered Nancy Burkholder by referring to her as a "transsexual man."

When it was clear this summer there was a known transsexual man attending the event, the festival security staff dealt with it as respectfully as possible.

Moving forward to the August 1999 press release again, it should be noted that the Vogel again use a direct comparison of black experience to womyn-born-womyn's experience -- one of many over the years.

We believe that individuals and organizations who are committed to disrupting or destroying womyn-born-womyn space are acting with ignorance and complete disregard for the legacy of misogyny and sexism that still pervades our daily lives. Just as many Womyn of Color express the need for 'room to breathe' they gain in Womyn-of-Color space away from the racism that inevitably appears in interactions with a white majority, womyn born womyn still need and value that same 'room to breathe'.

In August of 2000, MichFest put out an official handout entitled Community Discussion On Womyn-Born Womyn Space.

5. These are our bottom lines:

- The Festival is intended for womyn-born womyn, womyn who were born as and lived their entire life experience as female.
- We ask the transsexual community to respect this intention.
- We are committed to the position that no woman's gender will be questioned on the land. We have a commitment that Michigan remain a space that recognizes and celebrates the full range of what it means to be a womyn-born womyn - and that butch/gender-ambiguous womyn can move about our

community with confidence that their right to be here will not be questioned.

- We also have an obligation to run the Festival in a way that keeps faith with the womyn-born womyn policy, which may mean denying admission to individuals who self-declare as male-to-female transsexuals or female-to-male transsexuals now living as men (or asking them to leave if they enter).

Michigan Womyn's Music Festival
Aug. 8-13, 2000

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION ON WOMYN-BORN WOMYN SPACE
http://www.mwmmf.com/commdiscussion.htm

Distributed August 8, 2000

As we head into the 20th Festival with the prospect of a "Camp Trans" (TM), we thought a synopsis overview of the issues at hand along with the current working plan could be helpful. While we determine what to expect with this year's Camp Trans, we offer the working paper in the hopes that we can come together as a community to and in the same direction as we made the past 19th. Michigan Womyn's Festival, the recognition that there is great diversity of opinions and feelings on the issue. This is a community built upon feminist principles, we believe that we are big enough to hold our diversity of opinion with respect and care. We will use the guidelines for the larger community that exist as best as we can forward with what we feel is a position which we believe as a whole.

1. The Festival Community, in large regard, supports the womyn-born womyn policy.
2. The majority of letters received from last year's Festival were in support of the policy.
3. Most of the postings on the www.mwmmf.com discussion board are in support of the policy. (Support for Michigan's policy is also frequently voiced on the Camp Trans website by both transmen, transwomen, and trans allies who believe that womyn-born womyn space is not inevitably anti-trans.)
4. After extensive clarification of the policy at last year's Festival (including a written statement distributed at the Festival and reprinted in Lesbian Connection), a community of women, this community of women, chose to share a Festival defined as womyn-born womyn space.
5. 7,000 letters are on file as a Festival issue and defined as womyn-born womyn space.
6. It is also clear that there are differences of opinion within our community about the policy.
7. Some of us would like to explore, in a non-reactive dialogue, whether Michigan's definition of womyn-born womyn space can broaden to incorporate trans inclusion.
8. Some of us would like to reaffirm Michigan's commitment to womyn-born womyn space.
9. Some of us would like to try the subject to rest and not spend any more time or energy on it.
10. Beyond differences over the policy, members of our community have a broad range of perspectives on the larger TM issue.
11. Some of us are trans-identifiers and some are allies in female identity, and so in our community, some members are trans-people (in the classic definition of "trans" as a denial of the existence of the "other") often based in a lack of information or familiarity.
12. Some of us want to separate the behavior of specific trans individuals from the larger discussion of identity and policy. Some favor an academic/theoretical discussion, some want a political ideological discussion, for some the discussion is rights personal.
13. These issues touch a tender spot for many of us in our own gender experience, for masculine/female/antagonistic/womyn whose gender identity is the target of sexual "harassment," and for all of us who we feel our gender identity is in danger of being "erased" or "lost" in a political culture.
14. Underneath all of these perspectives lies a common thread of fear - and its big sister, anger.
15. For many of us, fear and anger over what lies like the thought of sexual and integrity, the celebration of who we are as women, that "womyn" is no longer what we are, and we are not something we are.
16. For some of us, fear and anger over the loss felt on the community and personal level of the ladies who no longer identify as womyn.
17. For those who support a trans-inclusive policy, and whose internal conflict with the womyn-born womyn policy means they may choose to leave, and - for those for whom womyn-born womyn space is essential to their experience of Michigan - fear of losing this beloved community.
18. For womyn whose gender role is questioned as a result of the events of the 1999 Festival, and/or some survivors, a loss of the sense of safety and security which is a previous part of Michigan.

BEHIND US ONE MOVIE FORWARD!

9. These are our beliefs here.
10. The Festival is intended for womyn-born womyn, womyn who were born as and lived that while the experience as female.
11. We are the transsexual community to respect this belief.
12. We are committed to the position that no woman's gender will be questioned on the basis of the fact that she has a commitment that Michigan remain a space that recognizes and celebrates the full range of what it means to be a woman-born womyn - and that sub-gender-antagonistic/womyn can move about our community with confidence that their rights to be here will not be questioned.
13. We also have an obligation to run the Festival in a way that leaves faith with the womyn-born womyn policy, which may mean denying admission to individuals who self-declare as male-to-female transsexuals or female-to-male transsexuals now living as men (or asking them to leave if they enter).
14. We want to use our best skills as a community to keep our energy focused on the Festival, which was created and continues as a celebration of our lives as women.

BE BEAUTY TO THE PLAYERS!

1. The Festival policy and these principles are being discussed with all front line areas (Communications/Security, Satellite, Staff Services, Front Gate, Camp Trans, Community Center). Clearly, if we all don't stand behind our own Camp Trans or others, we are that the entire community move forward with trust and respect for the women on these primary issues, whose response will be based on the principles outlined here. If there is a need to get further information out to the community, it will be distributed through various support, connections, and this points on the web, as quickly as necessary and able.
2. A condensed version of this working paper will be distributed to Festival goers so we can share our process and move forward as a unified community. It also needs something that is also available for the media which has shown little interest in the issue this year, and is available at other support and to friends of the Community Center.
3. All women are asked to support the Festival policy while functioning in the community as a woman. Women with questions or concerns about that ability to support the policy are encouraged to discuss their concerns with their coordinator and/or their support or Staff Services. Women approached by letters with questions can share this process with them, refer them to the working paper or direct them to the Community Center or Communications/Security group.
4. And as we call upon the transsexual community to support womyn-born womyn space, we encourage support and respect for the transsexual community. As a community, we at Michigan are committed to fighting prejudice and ignorance of all kinds, we do not want to see transpeople treated here as outsiders. Encouraging us to make a point of womyn-born womyn space is not a contradiction in using trans-people in the year 2000. The space community affirms that our identity was not the same as the other group in the past and we are not the same as the other group in the past and we are not the same as the other group in the past. We are doing enough to hold our incredible diversity of mutual respect and support.

Figure 4. Michigan Womyn's Music Festival: Community Discussion On Womyn-Born-Womyn Space (Official Handout, August 8-13, 2000)

And too, as in most of the earlier letters and press releases since the 2000's, Lisa Vogel and MichFest ask that trans women self-segregate -- that they choose to embrace that they're the only kind of women who by clear messaging are not welcome or desired at the festival.

In 2005, the Indigo Girls performed at MichFest, and Amy Ray decided to do a series of interviews about the festival. The third of the three was of Lisa Vogel. Amy Ray asked Vogel "Do you mind making a statement about the transgender issue and Michigan Womyn's Festival's "women born women only" policy?" Note that the question was about what she called a policy, and that Lisa Vogel didn't object to it being called a policy.

As a queer community we're all struggling around how we explore and expand gender definitions, and the women here who are creating this festival are part of that. And I feel very strongly that having a space for women, who are born women, to come together for a week, is a healthy, whole, loving space to provide for women who have that experience. To label that as transphobic is, to me, as misplaced as saying the women-of-color tent is racist, or to say that a transsexual-only space, a gathering of folks of women who are born men is misogynist. I have always in my heart believed in the politics and the culture of separate time and space. I have no issue with that for women-of-color, for Jewish women, for

older women, for younger women. I have seen the value of that and I learned the value of that from creating this space for so many years. So the troublesome thing is, in the queer community, if we can't, not just allow, but also actually actively support each other in taking the time and space that we need to have our own thing, then to come together, in all of our various forms, is going to take that much longer. And I understand how certain activists in the Camp Trans scene only see this as a negative statement, and I think that there's a lot of connection that's getting lost. Because, I really think that folks aren't understanding how crucial this space is, as it is, for the women who come here. And, maybe that's just it.



Figure 5. Amy Ray of the Indigo Girls interviews Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's Lisa Vogel for the Indigo Girls website (June 13, 2005)

Again, invoking race in a comparison between people of color and womyn-born-womyn; again, excluding trans women from her definition of womyn.

In 2006, trans women from Camp Trans purchased tickets for, and then attended MichFest. Camp Trans put out a press release that year stating “The Michigan Women’s Music Festival began admitting openly trans (transgender/transsexual) women last week, bringing success to a longstanding struggle by trans activists both inside and outside the festival.”

Lisa Vogel, speaking for MichFest that year, disagreed in a press release entitled Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival Sets The Record ‘Straight’ with the assertion that MichFest had changed their policy and trans women were welcome at the festival. In her own voice, she stated:

“I deeply desire healing in our communities, and I can see and feel that you want that too. I would love for you and the other organizers of Camp Trans to find the place in your hearts and politics to support and honor space for womyn who have had the experience of being born and living their life as womyn. I ask that you respect that womon born woman is a valid and honorable gender identity. I also ask that you

respect that womyn born womyn deeply need our space -- as do all communities who create space to gather, whether that be womyn of color, trans womyn or trans men... I wish you well, I want healing, and I believe this is possible between our communities, but not at the expense of deeply needed space for womyn born womyn.”

Vogel’s written request that Camp Trans organizers respect the Festival as womyn-born-womyn space was consistent with information provided to Camp Trans organizers who approached the Festival Box Office. “Does this represent a change in the Festival’s commitment to womyn-born womyn space? No.” says Vogel. “If a transwoman purchased a ticket, it represents nothing more than that woman choosing to disrespect the stated intention of this Festival.”

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 22, 2006
CONTACT: Lisa Vogel
231-757-4700

MICHIGAN WOMYN’S MUSIC FESTIVAL SETS THE RECORD ‘STRAIGHT’

East, Michigan – Seeking to correct misinformation widely distributed by “Camp Trans” organizers, Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival founder and producer Lisa Vogel released the following clarification:

“Since 1976, the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival has been created by and for womyn-born womyn. That is, womyn who were born as and have lived their entire life experience as womyn. Despite claims to the contrary by Camp Trans organizers, the Festival remains a safe and precious space intended for womyn-born womyn.”

The facts surrounding the interactions between WMTF and Camp Trans organizers are as follows:

In the months preceding this year’s Festival, held August 8 - 13, there was communication between a Camp Trans organizer named Loraine and Lisa Vogel. Letters from Loraine continued during the Festival, where they were hand-delivered to the Festival’s front gate from Camp Trans, which stays close to Front Service Lane across from Festival property. On Tuesday, August 8th, Camp Trans organizers requested at the Box Office about Festival admission. They were told that the Festival is intended for womyn-born womyn, and that those who seek to purchase tickets are asked to respect that intention. Camp Trans organizers left without purchasing tickets. They returned the next day and were given the same information. Loraine at that point chose to purchase a ticket.

On Wednesday, August 9th, Vogel sent a reply letter to Loraine which stated in part:

“I deeply desire healing in our communities, and I can see and hear that you want that too. I would love for you and the other organizers of Camp Trans to find that place in your hearts and bodies to support and share space for womyn who have had the experience of being born and living that life as womyn. I ask that you respect that womyn-born womyn is a valid and honorable gender identity. I also ask that you respect that womyn-born womyn deeply need our space -- as do all communities who create space to gather, whether that be womyn of color, trans womyn or trans men... I wish you well, I want healing, and I believe this is possible between our communities, but not at the expense of deeply needed space for womyn-born womyn.”

Vogel’s written request that Camp Trans organizers respect the Festival as womyn-born-womyn space was consistent with information provided to Camp Trans organizers who approached the Festival Box Office. “Does this represent a change in the Festival’s commitment to womyn-born womyn space?” says Lisa Vogel. “If a transwoman purchased a ticket, it represents nothing more than that woman choosing to disrespect the stated intention of this Festival.”

“As feminists, we call upon the transwomen’s community to help us maintain womyn-only space, including spaces created by and for womyn-born womyn. As sisters in struggle, we call upon the transwomen’s community to meditate upon, recognize and respect the differences in our shared experiences and our group identities even as we stand shoulder to shoulder as women, and as members of the greater queer community, the once again ask the transwomen’s community to recognize that the need for a separate womyn-born womyn space does not stand at odds with recognizing the larger and beautiful diversity of our shared community.”

~ ~ ~

In an effort to build further understanding of the Festival’s perspective, answers are provided to questions raised by the recent Camp Trans press release which contain misstatements:

Why would the Festival sell a ticket to an individual who is not a woman born woman if the Festival is intended as a space created by and for womyn-born womyn?

Plans to expand the Festival have been born to womyn who could be considered gender outlaws, either because of their sexual orientation (lesbian, bisexual, transgender, etc.) or their gender presentation (butch, tomboy, androgynous, femme, and anything in between). While womyn (including and including the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival) are gender variant womyn. Many of the younger womyn consider themselves differently gendered, many of the older womyn consider themselves lesbian, and the danger is not just on the left but on the right as well. Our generations mix continues to inform our ongoing understanding about gender identity and the range of what it means to be female. Michigan provides one of the safest places on the planet for womyn who live and express themselves in the widest free broader range of gender expression. As Festival organizers, we refuse to question anyone’s gender. We instead ask that everyone would be respectful as a valid gender identity, and that the broader queer and gender-diverse communities respect our commitment to one another each year for womyn-born womyn to gather.

Did the Festival previously refuse to sell tickets to transwomen?

The Festival has consistently communicated our intention about who the Festival is created by and for. In 1995, Camp Trans protesters caused extensive disruption at the Festival, in which a man from Camp Trans publicly threatened male guests in a common shower area and subsequent disruption of women’s space was noted. The following year, our 20th anniversary, we issued a statement that we would not sell tickets to those entering for the purpose of disrupting the Festival. WMTF’s policy is to create space for Camp Trans who choose to stay in a tenting. It is not a situational response to the Festival circumstances of 1995. WMTF’s mission is to measure the womyn who have attended for years that the Festival remained -- as it does today -- intended for womyn who were born as and have lived their entire life experience as womyn, despite the disruption and extensive disruption Camp Trans created.

Is the Festival transphobic?

We strongly assert there is nothing transphobic with choosing to spend one week with womyn who were born as, and have lived their lives as, womyn. It is a powerful, unspoken experience that womyn enjoy during this one week of being in the company of other womyn-born womyn. There are many opportunities in the world to share space with the entire queer community, and other spaces that welcome all who identify themselves as female. While the rich diversity now represented by the broader queer community, we believe there is room for all affinity groups to enjoy separately self-determined, supportive space if they choose. Recognizing womyn-born womyn space is no more inherently transphobic than recognizing womyn of color space is racist. The belief that womyn-born womyn have a right to gather separately from the greater womyn’s community, the choice to be forced into false definitions that require being pro-womyn-born womyn space with being anti-trans, instead, many of the womyn attending to the Michigan Festival are leaders and supporters of trans-womyn. The Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival respects the transwomen’s community as integral members of the greater queer community. We call upon the transwomen’s community in turn to respect and support womyn-born womyn space and to recognize that a need for a separate womyn-born womyn space does not stand at odds with recognizing transwomen as part of the larger diversity of the womyn’s community.

What is Camp Trans?

Camp Trans was first created in 1988 as a tented at the Festival as a womyn-born womyn space. Camp Trans re-organized in 1998 and has been held separately from the Festival property since. It is a small gathering of people who identify themselves as trans and welcome all who identify themselves as female. Service tent across the road. Camp Trans attempts to educate womyn who are attending the Festival about their point of view regarding trans inclusion of the Festival. We know they have approached the Festival to receive support, but the intention of their efforts remains as harmful, regardless of the sex they were born into. At other times, Camp Trans activists have advocated opening the Festival to all sexes and genders.

What is the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival? It is the largest and longest running womyn’s festival in the United States. Since the first Festival in 1976, tens of thousands of womyn from all corners of the world have made the journey to the quiet site of Leelanau National Michigan. The essence of the Festival is that it is one week a year that is for, and about the gender diversity of womyn-born womyn and as continue to identify our belief of how to create this space. Our focus has not changed in the 31 years of our celebration and continues to focus on the goal of providing a community space for a shared womyn-born womyn experience.

Figure 6. Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival Sets The Record ‘Straight’ (Press Release, August 22, 2006)

In this press release, she demonstrated that she could change her rhetoric without changing her objective of keeping trans women out of MichFest. But even in changing her rhetorical tact in those notable ways, she still resorted to using race in her arguments to compare people of color and womyn-born-womyn.

In the final paragraph of that press release, within quotation marks Vogel stated:

As feminists, we call upon the transwomen’s community to help us maintain womyn only space, including spaces created by and for womyn-born womyn. As sisters in struggle, we call upon the transwomen’s community to meditate upon, recognize and respect the differences in our shared experiences and our group identities even as we stand shoulder to shoulder as women, and as members of the greater queer community. We once again ask the transwomen’s community to recognize that the need for a separate

womyn-born womyn space does not stand at odds with recognizing the larger and beautiful diversity of our shared community.

Again, she asks trans women to self-segregate. Trans women are no longer referred to as men, but her desire to be separated from trans women at her festival didn't change at all. And, she acknowledged that the intent is policy -- the policy mentioned in the 2000 handout.

While this is widely pointed to by Camp Trans supporters as a "policy," it was a situational response to the heated circumstances of 1999, intended to reassure the womyn who have attended for years that the Festival remained - as it does today - intended for womyn who were born as and have lived their entire life experience as womyn, despite the disrespect and intentional disruption Camp Trans initiated.

As a white, lesbian woman, Vogel believes she can tell trans community members she isn't transphobic and therefore it's true. And again, she used race to make her point.

We strongly assert there is nothing transphobic with choosing to spend one week with womyn who were born as, and have lived their lives as, womyn. It is a powerful, uncommon experience that womyn enjoy during this one week of living in the company of other womyn-born womyn. There are many opportunities in the world to share space with the entire queer community, and other spaces that welcome all who define themselves as female. Within the rich diversity now represented by the broader queer community, we believe there is room for all affinity groups to enjoy separate, self-determined, supportive space if they choose. Supporting womyn-born womyn space is no more inherently transphobic than supporting womyn of color space is racist. We believe that womyn-born womyn have a right to gather separately from the greater womyn's community. We refuse to be forced into false dichotomies that equate being pro-womyn-born womyn space with being anti-trans; indeed, many of the womyn essential to the Michigan Festival are leaders and supporters of trans-solidarity work. The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival respects the transsexual community as integral members of the greater queer community. We call upon the transsexual community in turn to respect and support womyn-born womyn space and to recognize that a need for a separate womyn-born womyn space does not stand at odds with recognizing transwomen as part of the larger diversity of the womyn's community.

In 2013, a trans woman named Red Durkin started a petition towards MichFest becoming trans inclusive. She targeted the 2013 performers at the festival and asked them to boycott the festival until it became inclusive of trans women. Performers Nona Hendryx, Andrea Gibson, and Sea of Bees decided not to perform after the petition was generated, and the Indigo Girls stated that their 2013 appearance would be their last until the policy was changed. The petition had an effect.

Lisa Vogel responded on April 12, 2013. In an email entitled Letter to the Community, she began her equivocation over the word "female" as a new tact, and again appropriated trans community language to alienate and discriminate against trans women.

The Festival, for a single precious week, is intended for womyn who at birth were deemed female, who were raised as girls, and who identify as womyn. I believe that womyn-born womyn (WBW) is a lived experience that constitutes its own distinct gender identity.

From: "Michigan Festival Office" <Michigan_Festival_Office@gmail.com>
 Subject: Letter To The Community
 Date: April 12, 2013 3:08:08 AM PDT
 April 11, 2013

Letter to the Community

On March 28, an activist named Ned Durkin posted a petition on Change.org asking artists and attendees to boycott the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival until organizers fully and openly welcome all self-identified women. This petition has resuscitated a long-running debate about and within the Festival, a debate that has often included criticism, misrepresentation about the political heart of this gathering. There is no doubt that complex political debate is healthy and necessary within our communities; however, a boycott, within this context, fails to advance resolution and only works to exact damage. As the Festival's producer for her last 38 years, I write today to clarify the Festival's territory, intention and my desire for understanding within our communities, as well as to clarify where I stand on these issues. I have listened, I have talked, I have struggled, and I will continue to do so. I do not fear our differences. But I do fear the harm being done to the space held so dear by so many – the space known around the world as "Michigan" – by the way this conflict is playing out. And thus I hope you will consider what I have to say with an open heart and open mind, as I pledge to continue to listen to the diversity of voices in this struggle.

Why We Gather

The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival is a soulful gathering of womyn from all over the world, created 38 years ago during the height of feminist organizing. Built from the ground up by womyn's invention and womyn's labor, filled with art, performance, play and discourse – we live together for a week in the woods and create community as we know it in no other form. There is freedom on that land that womyn living under patriarchy rarely touch: freedom to walk in the woods at night alone without fear, to be clothed or not clothed depending solely on comfort and personal style and without judgment, to move and work and play and love without the socio-cultural constraints that uniquely push down on all womyn, all the time. For these reasons, Michigan remains vital and vibrant even though countless other institutions from that burst of consciousness are gone. For these reasons, there's no real debate about the value of the Festival – it is precisely why persons not so young as all some of this issue.

When we started Festival 38 years ago, we did so to make a home and a space where we could grow our own definition of female identity. At the time, the mere idea of a female identity autonomous of male identity was revolutionary. Over the course of nearly four decades, we have continued to discover, prefer and live out what it means to be womyn, identified and to recognize and honor diverse gender expressions among womyn. Every August we do the work of growing into a community inclusive and meaningful for womyn from diverse class and cultural experiences, different abilities and ages – a community alive with a value system grown from the core of radical feminism. Over time, some clear collective values have emerged: communal cooperation; a willingness to show up and listen, an ethics of love, compassion, and active care for others; an understanding of strength and force as autonomy; and a commitment to remain teachable. These values are the foundation of the Michigan community. These values reflect the intention of the space.

About the Intention

The Festival, for a single precious week, is intended for womyn who at birth were deemed female, who were raised as girls, and who identify as womyn. I believe that womyn-born womyn (WBW) is a lived experience that constitutes its own distinct gender identity.

As we struggle around the question of inclusion of transwomyn at the festival, we use the word intention very deliberately. Michigan holds this particular lived experience of womynhood as hallowed, meaningful, unique and rich. Our intention has always been coupled with the radical commitment to never question any woman's gender. We ask the greater community to respect this intention, and to value the complexity and validity of every gender identity, including that of WBW. The onus is on each individual to choose whether or how to respect that intention.

Rejecting Transphobia

I reject the assertion that creating a time and place for WBW to gather is inherently transphobic. This is a false dichotomy and one that prevents progress and understanding. I believe in the integrity of autonomous space used to gather and celebrate for any group, whether that autonomous space is defined by age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, gender, class or any other identity. Whatever spaces we carve out in our community to encourage healing and rejuvenation should be accepted, and we should support each other in this endeavor. Nobody should be asked to erase the need for autonomous spaces to demonstrate that they are sisters in struggle.

Figure 7. Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Letter to the Community (signed by Lisa Vogel, April 12, 2013)

She again claims she's not transphobic, and that excluding trans women in the intention of the festival is inherently transphobic, while again bringing up the comparison of people of color and womyn-born-womyn.

I reject the assertion that creating a time and place for WBW to gather is inherently transphobic. This is a false dichotomy and one that prevents progress and understanding. I believe in the integrity of autonomous space used to gather and celebrate for any group, whether that autonomous space is defined by age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, gender, class or any other identity. Whatever spaces we carve out in our community to encourage healing and rejuvenation should be accepted, and we should support each other in this endeavor. Nobody should be asked to erase the need for autonomous spaces to demonstrate that they are sisters in struggle.

Clearly, our community struggles with the wide-ranging opinions that have formed around this question. Womyn who love the Festival deeply have intense feelings on all sides of this issue. There have been a great many good, loving and smart discussions between womyn who profoundly disagree, and there have been disrespectful and dehumanizing behaviors on both sides of the debate that demean all of our feminist political ideals. We all must stand up against hate speech, harassment and threats in any form, against any individual and against all of our communities.

I passionately believe the healing in our community will occur when we unconditionally accept transwomyn as womyn while not dismissing or disavowing the lived experience and realities of the WBW gender identity. Sadly, the extreme voices on this issue have driven much of the discussion, and the aggressive rhetoric leaves little room for building the alliances that are critical to everyone's survival, growth and integrity.

We must find ways to be allies in this discussion. I know that for some, WBW space seems flatly incompatible with honoring and supporting transwomyn within the larger womyn's communities. Regardless, we must listen to those who believe in the power of every woman's voice, and commit to stay

in a process with open hearts, open minds, and abiding respect even when that conversation gets incredibly hard. Space for WBW and a true solidarity with the trans community can and does co-exist.

The extreme positions being repeated, stoked, and disseminated on the internet do not represent the complex wholeness of the Festival voice, and they overshadow the more measured communication that will heal this divide.

That sentiment doesn't seem likely due to Vogel's intransigence on the issue of trans inclusion.

When people ask me about writing and speaking, the piece of advice is to know your audience. When Vogel speaks to the public, she speaks of discussion. When she speaks to those she considers her festival family, she drops the pretense that discussion will ever change her point of view as long as she's MichFest's producer. This again can be seen in her May 15, 2013 email entitled "Festival - How You Can Help to those whom she refers to as her "sisters."

We are embroiled in a very public struggle about the Festival's intention to create self-defined space for WBW.

...Sisters I believe now as much as I ever have that the space the Festival holds for our community is vital, precious and beautiful. The Festival will not go on forever, but I know this is not her time to end. Please join me in that belief and show your support towards the continuation of our community in whatever way you are able.

From: "Michigan Womyn's Music Festival" <Michigan_Womyn's_Music_Festival@mail.wmwp.com>
Subject: Festival - How you can help
Date: May 15, 2013 11:42:53 AM PDT

Dear Festival Family,

We are embroiled in a very public struggle about the Festival's intention to create self-defined space for WBW. Many of you have asked how you can help. Here is what you can do:

Take care in your conversation on the internet, on Facebook pages, in emails and meetings. I believe we must try our best, as a community, to participate in the energetic discourse to the aggressive rhetoric. Regardless of how heated the discourse may sometimes get, please do your best to honor and support all women and nurture our common ground, in all possible moments, in respectful ways.

Conflict always has unexpected results: sometimes it causes injury, sometimes it brings liberation and often it fuels an unexpected synthesis of seemingly incongruous experiences. Conflict always moves us forward, in our fragility, to whatever lies ahead of us. In that spirit, I ask you to recognize the power of your support for Festival and to stand by her in 2013. If you love the Festival, this is the year to show it. This is the year to come to Michigan. This is the year to bring your friends, your neighbors, and all the folk who have been saying they have wanted to come for years. If you love the Land and want to support the continuation of this vital and amazing community, please do what you can to sustain her and join us this year.

Whether you can be on the land this year or not, if you are able to support the Festival economically, we ask that you consider supporting her in one of the following ways:

Purchase a "ticket in spirit" for the 2013 Festival. The ticket goes to no woman - it goes to the spirit of us all, and to the creation of the space for womyn still to come.

Purchase a "ticket in memory" for one of our beloved sisters who is no longer able to walk the Land with us. There will be a place to name the woman whose memory you are honoring.

Support sliding scale and reduced rate - Pay the top of the scale for your ticket, and/or offer a donation to support Festival's ongoing commitment to reduced rate accessibility for low-income womyn. Your contribution stands with the principles of the WMF to make this event economically accessible, and will directly help to cover the womyn who cannot presently attend Festival at the regular rate.

Purchase an honorary ticket to the 40th anniversary in a gift amount of \$1000-\$1000/\$2000. You are buying the belief that our shared intention will bring us together on the Land in 2016, and you will receive your ticket in December of 2014.

Sisters I believe now as much as I ever have that the space the Festival holds for our community is vital, precious and beautiful. The Festival will not go on forever, but I know this is not her time to end. Please join me in that belief and show your support towards the continuation of our community in whatever way you are able.

With my love,

Lisa

PS - because I never gets old, and it always takes us there - Amazon

If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please reply to this message with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line or simply click on the following link: [Unsubscribe](#)

WMF/MC
PO Box 23
Pittsford, Michigan 49078
US
Read the [Festival/WMF marketing policy](#).

Figure 8. Michigan Womyn's Music Festival's email How You Can Help (May 15, 2013)

The phrasing that Vogel uses in that email seems to be indicating that she's not counting trans women among her sisters.

The subtle phrasing of Vogel in her September 4, 2013 email follow in the same vein. It begins...

Dear Sisters -

I am writing this from the Walhalla office, August has just passed, and we are in our last few days in Michigan. I want to thank all of you for this year's most incredible Festival - for bringing your best selves to this beloved community - your big hearts, your incredible fire and creativity, your playful and thoughtful selves, your passion for creating this city of womyn together. This has truly been the Summer of Love in action. To the sisters who were not able to be with us on the Land this year, who lit a candle, sang a verse of Amazon, imagined the Land under the hope of the new moon - your spirits were strong and always part of our greater good.

From: 'Michigan Womyn's Music Festival' <Michigan_Womyns_Music_Festival@gmail.com>
Subject: Fall letter from Michfest
Date: September 4, 2013 2:23:49 AM PDT

The Summer of Love - The Season of Sisterhood - The Belief in our Community

Dear Sisters -

I am writing this from the Walhalla office, August has just passed, and we are in our last few days in Michigan. I want to thank all of you for this year's most incredible Festival - for bringing your best selves to this beloved community - your big hearts, your incredible fire and creativity, your playful and thoughtful selves, your passion for creating this city of womyn together. This has truly been the Summer of Love in action. To the sisters who were not able to be with us on the Land this year, who lit a candle, sang a verse of Amazon, imagined the Land under the hope of the new moon - your spirits were strong and always part of our greater good.

I leave August grateful for every moment: the hard sweaty work, the open smiles on the path, the touch of so many sisters, the words that held us so closely, each and every conversation that made me think that this was indeed the best and most of all - the absolute rejuvenation I feel in our beautiful family of womyn. Together, each of us walked through the doors of doubt into the open air belief, in us, of our most beautiful community.

We are a complex community and this ongoing dialectic that is, our investigation of the truth through discussion around sex, gender and intersecting identities is not simple. We know in our hearts that there is no one right answer, and we are working together to shift the focus towards asking more genuine/complex questions and speaking with gentler, compassionate voices as we bring our true compassionate hearts and minds to this process. The path of communication we nurtured together on the Land, around fires, on paths and in circles at workshops, will continue. We can and will build on this process in our home communities, in our personal circles, and when our community gathers again here in late next August.

The intention of Michigan as a space for womyn born female and the question of trans inclusion has been a painful issue within the Festival. It is important that we continue these discussions and truly build alliances across our complicated and multi-faceted identities and beliefs, based on truths, compassionate conversation and mutual respect. In Michigan, as well as in our home communities, the difficulties we have experienced having these discussions in a clear and open-headed format has pulled a great deal of focus. It is critical that we remember - as a vibrant living and diverse community - that a just world for all humans is our common ground and our greatest good. This is a fundamental belief I hold dear as founder and producer of the Festival, and as a radical feminist woman, I pledge to continue to foster and support discussions about gender identities and to move the Festival's commitment to feminist community work around issues of sexism, racism, classism, ageism, ableism, issues that, in their own up ways, overlap, injure and separate us. This conversation must be an ongoing process in our interconnected community, good work is never complete - we are always in process.

I also want to thank you for your support of the Festival during this complex and challenging year. Many each of you who offered what she could, gave your gifts, returned to you friends. Every single woman who offered financial support, who shared her energy, who held us in the light, who showed up at Festival or encouraged others to do so, who took a moment to set her intention on the Land in August from posts around our mother planet - I thank you for believing in and supporting this community, this Festival.

With your support we have met the expenses of this year's Festival - a goal that seemed impossible in early June! In order to meet our operating costs and send money towards the 2014 Festival, we will need to continue to reach out to our community and generate some mid-season sales to keep the home fires burning and get us moving towards the 2014 Festival. You've made some awesome suggestions online and we're following up on them! Please watch for a follow-up email in a few weeks about automatic monthly bank withdrawals for those of you who would like to, who want to purchase Tokens in Remembrance or to purchase Tokens to the 40th Anniversary. We will also send out information for those of you who want to start to pay for your 2014 ticket by monthly deduction, and there will be a last chance to buy collections and caps.

Soon we will make those amazing hot porn photos available for you to purchase, as well as some gorgeous Festival Moment images in sizes that will do your home walls proud and keep Michigan in your sight all year!

The community we create together can be so deeply magical, so profoundly transformative, and so gently healing. It is in this fertile ground that we plant the seeds of our beautiful, continual, revolution. For these precious weeks, we nurture a culture where we live within the rare, all-encompassing feeling of unity that allows us to solidify our commitment to righteous action and simultaneously dissolve the constraints of isolation, vanity and distrust. We create a revolution where we liberate our playful, fierce, foxy and feral selves - and move forward with trust in the union of our sisterhood. This is what we grow when we are together with clear intention. This is what we can create, nurture and pass on in every aspect of our lives.

Keep that precious light alive all year sisters - until we meet again under August skies...

Much love,
Lisa

"I'm going to camp out on the land!
I'm going to try and get my soul free!"
Joan Mieland, 1970

WWYWC: PO Box 22, Walhalla, MI 49880 817 221-757-4198
michfest.com 417 facebook.com/michfest

Figure 9. Michigan Womyn's Music Festival email entitled 'The Summer of Love - The Season of Sisterhood - The Belief in our Community' (signed by Lisa Vogel, September 4, 2013)

If by intention trans women aren't welcome on that land, then it's hard to belong to the "beloved community" Vogel alludes to.

The community we create together can be so deeply magical, so profoundly transformative, and so gently healing. It is in this fertile ground that we plant the seeds of our beautiful, continual, revolution. For these precious weeks, we nurture a culture where we live within the rare, all-encompassing feeling of unity that allows us to solidify our commitment to righteous action and simultaneously dissolve the constraints of isolation, vanity and distrust. We create a revolution where we liberate our playful, fierce, foxy and feral selves - and move forward with trust in the union of our sisterhood. This is what we grow when we are together with clear intention. This is what we can create, nurture and pass on in every aspect of our lives.

The "we" of "womyn" is again identified in a way that that is meant to exclude trans women from the community of women...an intentional exclusion from sisterhood.

The messaging of the May 9, 2014 Letter to the Community has a paragraph where the term female for womyn-born-womyn, but not for trans women, and using it within the non sequitur context of girls being kidnapped and sold into sex slavery.

Trans womyn and transmen have always attended this gathering. Some attend wanting to change the intention, while others feel the intention includes them. Deciding how the festival's intention applies to each person is not what we're about. Defining the intention of the gathering for ourselves is vital. Being born female in this culture has meaning, it is an authentic experience, one that has actual lived consequences. These experiences provide important context to the fabric of our lives, context that is chronically missing from the conversation about the very few autonomous spaces created for females. This erasure is particularly mindboggling in a week when 276 girls were kidnapped and sold into sex slavery solely because they were female. This is the world females live in.



Figure 10. Michigan Womyn's Music Festival website posted 'Letter To The Community' (signed by Lisa Vogel; May 5, 2014)

TERF Cathy Brennan at one point in 2011 made a distinction between the terms woman and female in a similar manner to the way that Lisa Vogel appears to have done since 2006. In an interview with Rev. Mother Meredith Moise for Baltimore OutLoud, Brennan described her then thoughts in this way:

I appreciate and respect that women of transgender and transsexual experience struggle to be accepted and recognized as women. I personally accept women of transgender and transsexual experience as women. Meanwhile, females in 2011 continue to struggle to be accepted as human. I would encourage women of transgender and transsexual experience to help us in our struggle as well.

If you note, Lisa Vogel has been more subtly doing the same equivocation between woman and female

that Brennan used to do between woman and female.

Rhetorically differentiating between trans women and females isn't confined to just Vogel and Brennan -- it's a viewpoint that other trans-exclusionary feminists have expressed. For example, the blogger of Gender Minefield posted this in her blog entry It's time for trans women to step away from feminism:

[Cristan Williams] fights against safe spaces for women by continually denying the possibility that overly-vague gender identity laws open the door for abusive men to purposely trigger or victimize females in spaces designated safe for them. Williams routinely reacts to reports of these instances by trying to poke holes in the complainants' stories, discredit the sources and blame 'TERFs' instead of entertaining the idea that a more nuanced and balanced approach to legislation and policy would benefit both females and trans women.

As another example of this, is from the blogger transgender-hurts-women in her blog Critical Analysis of Gender. Her post An Invasion of Female Space: Males attempting to invade Smith College includes these paragraphs:

Recently, there has been a push by trans activists to allow any male who "identifies" as a woman into this college, after a trans woman was rejected last year. Apparently, there should be no spaces where males are not allowed, and if you disagree, you're transphobic and discriminating.

...From what I've read, the school isn't giving in, yet but they are making "deals." There should be no giving in, no meeting halfway, because safe spaces for females in our male dominated society are quickly fading away.

A third example is from the twitter account of @feministroar.



Figure 11. Twitter screenshot: @FeministRoar's 'Transwomen are male' (August 14, 2014, 10:07 AM)

Vogel's rhetorical differentiation between trans women and females isn't unique at all in feminist circles. It's a rhetorical differentiation that directly states, or indirectly implies, that trans women are male women.

Vogel had more to say in that May 14th letter.

There are many who are trying to forge a conversation that is based on open dialogue -- both as a political value, and as the best tool to reduce divisions and build strong empathetic understanding and alliance. We cannot allow the tactics of fear, bullying and harassment to control our community. We cannot stand by as people are harassed on Facebook and Twitter, as feminist artists and events are

boycotted, communities are censured, and threats of violence are bandied around as acceptable speech.

As is true in all of our home communities, the Michigan community is of many hearts and minds in this conversation, and we are committed to shifting our focus towards building alliances across our multi-faceted identities and beliefs. We organized a series of workshops last year on the land that were a beautiful living model for how to forge dialogue, to speak to and hear one another through difference, to practice radical listening and to aid community building. Hundreds of womyn participated, including trans womyn, and some of the most radical and healing work was created by womyn representing the full spectrum of perspectives on this and other complex gender identity issues.

On one hand, trans women aren't welcome at the festival, but on the other hand, Vogel makes a point to say that dialogue is occurring in the MichFest land between cis women and trans women -- and that it's beneficial. It doesn't seem to make sense to hang onto an intention that Vogel knows isn't being followed, but it appears this functionally is about who is empowered to decide who is a woman and who is a man; who is a female and who is a male -- and who is a male woman.

Between mid-May and early August, the situation between MichFest and the rest of the LGBT community changed radically. Equality Michigan came out against MichFest's womyn-born-womyn policy and started a petition to end it. The petition lists six commitments by the petition's authoring organization and its signatories, and these are:

1. Demanding you end the "womyn-born-womyn" intention at Michigan Womyn's Music Festival.
2. Request that Lisa Vogel, as co-founder and owner, meet with leaders of the transgender community and enter the space with an open mind to the notion that transgender womyn are womyn too, and have shared in their experiences.
3. Asking artists and attendees to act in harmony with their equal rights values and NOT attend the festival until the transgender discrimination ends, and instead support other women's events which are creating a safe space for transgender women so they can join as well.
4. Requesting that any artists participating this year speak against the policy while on stage.
5. Make it clear to any artists and vendors participating in the future that until this policy ends, their participation will be seen as anti-transgender discrimination.
6. Share publicly a list of any future artists and vendors with entertainment venues and LGBT event producers with an explanation as to why they are seen as having committed anti-transgender discrimination.

A number of other LGBT and women's organizations -- that include the Human Rights Campaign, the Task Force, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, BiNet USA, BI Cast, Secular Woman, the Equality Federation, Pride@Work, and Affirmations, joined in calling for the end of the womyn-born-womyn policy (currently referred to by Lisa Vogel and MichFest as an intention.)

Particularly of note are GLAAD, the leading LGBT organization with a focus on media, and the National Black Justice Coalition, the leading LGBT organization focusing on the intersection of African-American and LGBT communities. GLAAD's position puts significant pressure on LGBT community's performers to not perform at the festival as long as the WBW policy/intention is in place, and the National Black Justice Coalition, by signing on to the commitments of the petition, takes a bit

of the wind out of the sails of the frequent comparison by white lesbian Lisa Vogel between persons of color experience and womyn-born-womyn experience.

Just after the HRC signed onto the Equality Michigan's call for MichFest to end their womyn-born-women policy/intent, but before GLAAD and the National Black Justice Coalition signed on, MichFest issued a Facebook statement on August 1st that's phrasing and style reads as though written by Lisa Vogel -- and most likely was.

Over the past week, a number of LGBTQ organizations (including Equality Michigan and the Human Rights Campaign) have asserted that the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival ("MWMF") believes transgender womyn are "less than" other womyn, and that the Festival's intention is the equivalent of the U.S. military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. We once again passionately reject these allegations and write to speak our truths.

An intention is a deeply feminist approach to a complex community discussion. It is a purposeful focus that rejects the creation of hard lines; lines that have been used from time immemorial to subjugate and silence all womyn and to "keep them in their place." Ours is a fundamental and respectful feminist declaration about who this gathering is intended for, and if some cannot hear this without translating that into a "policy", "ban" or a "prohibition," this speaks to a deep-seated failure to think outside of structures of control that inform and guide the patriarchal world. As we have said time and time again, we leave the onus on each individual to choose whether or how to respect this intention. Indeed, every year, transgender womyn choose to attend the Festival in the belief that the intention includes them.

[Facebook statement on August 1, 2014 about Equality Michigan and the HRC condemning womyn born woman \(WBW\) intention](#)

Over the past week, a number of LGBTQ+ organizations (including Equality Michigan and the Human Rights Campaign) have asserted that the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival ("MWMF") harbors transgender womyn who are "less than" other womyn, and that the Festival's intention is the equivalent of the U.S. military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. We snap again passionately reject these allegations and write to speak our truths.

All intention is a deeply feminist approach to a complex community discussion. It is a purposeful focus that rejects the creation of hard lines, lines that have been used from time immemorial to subjugate and silence all womyn and to "keep them in their place." Ours is a fundamental and respectful feminist declaration about who this gathering is intended for, and if some cannot live this without fantasizing that into a "policy," "law" or a "prohibition," this speaks to a deep-seated failure to think outside of structures of control that inform and guide the patriarchal world. As we have said time and time again, we leave the onus on each individual to choose whether or how to respect this intention. Indeed, every year, transgender womyn choose to attend the Festival in the belief that the intention includes them.

Acknowledging difference amongst ourselves is a critical part of what the Festival is about. Ignoring these essential places of difference is also to the political perspective that insists on being "invisible" or "not seeing race." Considering the different elements of lived experience is, in fact, what allows us to fight the misogyny, transphobia, racism, and other oppressions that weigh upon all of us. The experience of being female, like the experience of being trans, informs how we become the womyn we are. Recognizing the inherent differences in these overlapping experiences is the true meaning of intersectionality. Gathering around these particular strands of experience is no more discriminatory than womyn from the continent of Africa gathering without African-American womyn, womyn from the U.S. South gathering without womyn from the Pacific Northwest, or womyn who gather separately from womyn with class privilege. All of our experiences are real. To create a hierarchy of oppression that disappears any group's experience sets us one against the other.

MWMF is not just a party. It is a space wherein females—who have been subjected to all manner of degradation from the moment of their first breath—can unpack and put down the oppressions that are directly tied to that experience under patriarchy. The celebration that unfolds over the six days of the Festival stems from putting ourselves back together again after the shattering experience of living as gender non-conforming, feminist, queer womyn forced to fit into constraints of what a woman or girl is "supposed to be," in reassembling ourselves at MWMF. The Festival creates a woman-led space for womyn and girls. These instruments are indispensable in a culture hell-bent on stripping womyn of our ability to reclaim our own sense of selves outside the suffocating gender boxes of "girl" or "woman," boxes that grow smaller by the day. From the Supreme Court's recent *Middletown* decision allowing lawyers and corporations to deny females fundamental contraceptive access, to the continuation of pregnant womyn who suffer from abortion, to the kidnapping of over 200 Nigerian girls and forcing them into slave labor, we are rapidly returning to the times when females are refused the sanctity of our own bodies, our own autonomy, and our right to simply exist on our own terms.

Equality Michigan has initiated a petition and call to action against the Festival based on misrepresentations, purposeful omissions, and selective editing of past Festival statements on this issue. In doing so, they are choosing to silence the decades long true reason for the Festival's existence - to create an alternative to the debilitating misogynist culture we are all trapped in. We call upon those who signed the petition and bloggers repeating Equality Michigan's statements to stop circulating this misinformation and to include our truth. To this end, the Festival offers these simple facts:

- We believe all humans suffer under patriarchy;
- We believe that transgender womyn are womyn;
- We believe that females experience a unique, historical, and debilitating oppression as a class under patriarchy;
- We believe that the subjugation of females is an international phenomenon, experienced across time, culture, nation, class, ethnicity, ability and race;
- MWMF has, since its inception in 1976, formed itself as a space for womyn-born-female as a means to resist and survive the debilitation of female subjugation;
- We believe that support for womyn-born-female space is not at odds with standing with and for the transgender community;
- We believe that the statements calling for the boycott of the MWMF neither speak for all transgender womyn nor include all of their voices, many of whom are silenced or ignored with regard to their support of the Festival's intention of womyn-born-female space, for example, the New Narratives Conference held in Portland, Oregon this Spring. (<http://newnarratives2014.wordpress.com/>)

In 2013, the Festival held a series of workshops, called *Adoles in Understanding*, whose sole purpose was to engage in a grounded and complex discussion about the intention of the Festival as autonomous womyn-born-female space, and to practice and model radical listening communication, where we hear one another through differences. Hundreds of womyn on all sides of the issue attended, including transgender womyn. These workshops will be repeated again in 2014 in a four day format.

As community based LGBTQ+ and feminist organizations told one after the other, MWMF remains a miracle: a feminist institution created by the hands, souls, and sweat of the womyn who attend and build it. We do not know what the future holds, the 43th may be our last, the 45th may be our last, or the 50th may be our last. None of that matters today. Our focus and our hearts are in making sure that this Festival, the 39th, respects and honors the womyn who attend each year.

Our LGBTQ+ institutions should protect all of our needs for recovery and survival; not cannibalize our mutual needs for liberation. We will not stand by in silence as events are boycotted, festival artists are targeted, and community members who attend or support Michigan are bullied into silence and shamed for their love of the Michigan community.

We are not afraid of our differences and disagreements. And we will not back down from our right to define autonomous space for ourselves. The greater liberation of all womyn, which clearly includes trans womyn, is to find where our struggles intersect, and to work towards common goals while respecting and honoring the specificity of our differences. We strive to create a world where we live in solidarity as womyn, voices in struggle, standing shoulder to shoulder.

If our way of working through our differences as a broader LGBTQ+ community is to viciously denigrate lesbian feminist institutions, we will all be standing on the bones of our mothers.

Figure 12. Facebook statement on August 1, 2014 about Equality Michigan and the HRC condemning womyn born woman (WBW) intention

It is that never-ending discussion Vogel wants to have that won't apparently resolve rooted in her "feminist approach" and "feminist declaration" the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival isn't for all women/womyn.

She then equivocates over the term female in a manner similar to how she equivocated in 2006. Note how Vogel, between the second and third bullet points of the Facebook statement, pivots from referring to trans women as trans womyn to subtly switching to the term female to describe women who aren't trans.

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In 1977, 1991, and 1999, she and/or official MichFest documents identified trans women as male and as men. For the past decade or so she's been referring to trans women as womyn, but not as females.

And, I believe the conclusion one may reasonably draw is that Lisa Vogel believes that cis women are females and trans women are males, and that she uses gender-coded language to message that. This doesn't show a shift of viewpoint since 1977 by Vogel, but a shift of language used to describe a consistent viewpoint. And that viewpoint is bigoted; that viewpoint is transphobic -- despite all claims by her that it isn't.

Suggested citation

Autumn Sandeen. "#TERFweek: The Changed Language But Consistent Viewpoint Of MichFest's Lisa Vogel."

TransAdvocate, August 14, 2014.

https://www.transadvocate.com/terfweek-the-changed-language-but-consistent-viewpoint-of-michfests-lisa-vogel_n_14212.htm