

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

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION ON WOMYN-BORN WOMYN SPACE
<http://www.michfest.com/Updates/handout.htm>

Distributed August 8, 2000

As we head into the 2000 Festival with the prospect of a "CampTransY2K," we thought a concise overview of the issues at hand along with the current working plan would be helpful. While we don't know what to expect with this year's Camp Trans, we offer this working paper in the hopes that we can come together as a community to pull in the same direction as we create this year's 25th Anniversary Festival. We recognize that there is great diversity of opinions and feelings on this issue. Ours is a community built upon feminist principles; we believe that we are big enough to hold our diversity of opinion with respect and love. We will lay the groundwork for the larger community that will join us soon; if we move forward with unified trust it will have a positive effect on the Festival as a whole.

1. The Festival Community, in large part, supports the womyn-born womyn policy:

* The majority of festie-feedback from last year's Festival was in support of the policy.

* Most of the postings on the www.michfest.com discussion board are in support of the policy. (Support for Michigan's policy is also frequently voiced on the CampTrans website by both transmen, transwomen, and trans-allies who believe that womyn-born womyn space is not inherently anti-trans.)

* 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 workers - this community of workers - chose to return to a Festival defined as womyn-born womyn space.

* 7,000 festies are en route to a Festival known and defined as womyn-born womyn space.

2. It's also clear that there are differences of opinion within our community about the policy:

* Some of us would like to explore, in a non-reactive dialogue, whether Michigan's definition of womyn-only space can broaden to incorporate trans inclusion.

* Some of us want to reaffirm Michigan's commitment to womyn-born womyn's space.

* Some of us would like to lay the subject to rest and not spend any more time or energy on it.

3. Beyond differences over the policy, members of our community have a broad range of perspectives on the larger TS issue:

* Some of us are trans-identified and some are active in trans-ally work. And as in any community, some members are trans-phobic (in the classic definition of fear/hatred or denial of the existence of the "other," often based in a lack of information or familiarity).

* Some of us want to separate the behavior of specific trans-activists 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 highly personal.

* These issues touch a tender spot for many of us in our own gender experience, for masculine/ butch/ gender ambiguous womyn whose gender identity is the target of societal hostility, and for all of us who've had restrictive gender roles imposed on us. Some of us believe that being lesbian is in itself a trans identity as we don't "behave" as womyn are expected to in a patriarchal culture.

4. Underneath all of these perspectives lies a common thread of fear - and its big sister, anger:

* For many of us, fear and anger over what feels like the triumph of sexism and misogyny: the obliteration of who we are as womyn; that "woman" is no longer seen as a valid identity, but as something mutable.

* For some of us, fear and anger over the loss felt on the community and personal level of the dykes who no longer identify as womyn.

* 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.

* For womyn whose gender was questioned as a result of the events of the 1999 Festival, and for some survivors, a loss of the sense of safety and security which is a precious part of Michigan.

SO HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD?

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).

6. We need 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 womyn.

SO WHAT'S THE PLAN?

7. The Festival policy and these principles are being discussed with all front-line crews (Communications/ Security, Satellite, Staff Services, Front Gate crews, Community Center, Oasis). If met with direct political action from Camp Trans or others, we ask that the worker community move forward with trust and respect for the womyn on these primary crews, 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 Worker Support, coordinators, and key points on the land, as quickly as accuracy will allow.

8. A condensed version of this working paper will be distributed to festival-goers so we can share our process and move forward as a united community. A statement reaffirming Festival policy is also available for the media (which has shown little interest in the issue this year), and is available at Worker Support and to festies at the Community Center.

9. All workers are asked to support the Festival policy while functioning in the community as a worker. Workers with questions or concerns about their ability to support the policy are encouraged to discuss their concerns with their coordinator and/or Worker Support or Staff Services. Workers approached by festies with questions can share this process with them, refer them to the working paper, or direct them to the Community Center or Communications/Security womyn.

10. Just 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 in Michigan are committed to fighting prejudice and ignorance of all kinds; we do not want to see transphobia fostered here or anywhere. Claiming one week a year as womyn-born womyn space is not in contradiction to being trans-positive. In the year 2000, the queer community enjoys such rich diversity, we believe there is room for all affinity groups to enjoy separate and supportive space, and also to come together in broader alliances. We are strong enough to hold our incredible diversity in mutual respect and support.