



May 9, 2014

Greetings from Michfest,

I am reaching out because there are a few things that are important to clarify as we move through another blur of "social" media circus tricks. Social media -- a tool that can be such a powerful instrument of sharing, inspiration and connection -- has made our community more connected in tangible and beautiful ways. But as a tool, it cuts both ways, and is often used as a means to propagate misinformation, bully those who do not agree with a point of view or shame sisters into silence.

It is completely impossible to correct all of the inaccurate statements that fly about the internet. One hopes that the press would make some effort to distinguish between personal judgments and fact, but much of our community press sadly plays out more like individual blogs cobbled together into a platform presented as journalistic truth.

I believe it is possible for our community to have complex conversations, even waded through deep and passionate disagreements, without depending on the crutch of deliberate inaccuracies and repetitive name-calling as a tool to disgrace, shame and silence another point of view.

Because of the recent spray of articles about the Festival, I am sharing this statement about the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival.

With my respect,
Lisa Vogel

The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival was created in 1976 as a space to gather in celebration and exploration of the experiences of females. For almost 40 years, it has been a welcoming space for revolutionary womyn and girls who personify a broad spectrum of gender. Anyone who has been to the Festival knows firsthand the truly radical and diverse nature of our community. There is no greater variety of embodied womyn's gender expression anywhere else in the world. However we express our individual gender identity, for this one week, we recreate ourselves outside the margins of female socialization, and use this sanctuary to examine and unpack the very real oppression of being born and raised as females in our male-defined culture. We carve out this space to turn our attention toward ourselves and toward one another in a culture created and defined by us.

We have said that this space, for this week, is intended to be for womyn who were born female, raised as girls and who continue to identify as womyn. This is an intention for the spirit of our gathering, rather than the focus of the festival. It is not a policy, or a ban on anyone. We do not "restrict festival attendance to cisgendered womyn, prohibiting trans women" as was recently claimed in several Advocate articles. We do not and will not question anyone's gender. Rather, we trust the greater queer community to respect this intention, leaving the onus on each individual to choose whether or how to respect it. Ours is a fundamental and respectful feminist statement 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.

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.

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 censored, 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.

We will continue this work at the 2014 Festival as we carry on our longstanding tradition of positive and radical discussions. We will continue to have these conversations face-to-face, heart-to-heart, not walled off from this difficult conversation or standing behind anonymous computer screens and keyboards. We remain committed to always approaching at times complex and even divisive issues with compassion, love and respect.