



# Camp Trans Confronts Transphobia at Michigan Women's Music Festival

**CAMP TRANS BRINGS TOGETHER TRANS** men, trans women, as well as non-trans allies into the struggle for trans-equality and the end of the Michigan Women's Music Festival's (MWMF) policy of excluding trans women. This year we're sharpening our focus on ending the policy and organizing to fight transphobia in our local communities. In addition to activities and outreach with festival attendees, we are planning workshops, facilitated discussions and training oriented towards grassroots activism!

Camp Trans, which began in 1992 after a transsexual woman was thrown out of MWMF because festival staff found out that she was transsexual, is an annual protest against the festival's policy that bars transsexual women from openly attending. MWMF's so-called "womyn-born womyn" policy sets a transphobic standard for women-only spaces across the country, and contributes to an environment in women's and lesbian communities that discrimination against trans women is considered acceptable.

These policies go against many of the tenets of feminism. Julia Serano, an Oakland-based writer, musician, and spoken word artist, who has written and spoken on the issue of the inclusion of trans women in women's spaces, had this to say: "Policies that exclude trans women from women's spaces and events, such as the one enforced by the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, are not only anti-trans, but anti-feminist: They privilege trans women's appearances, socializations and the sex others naively assigned to us at birth over our persons, our minds and our abilities; they rampantly objectify trans women by reducing us to our body parts."

Rahne Alexander, songwriter and comic performance artist from Baltimore, also observes, "The exclusionary policy is something that has fragmented a portion of the community, leaving feminist trans women like myself to feel isolated and endangered even within communities of feminists, lesbians and other women. To merely allow admission to trans women who have been able to afford genital surgery is at the very least a classist position, and at worst a reliance on a heteronormative understanding of gender, medicine, and financial status."

"These policies harm more than just trans women," says Lorraine Donaldson, the 2006 Strategy Coordinator for Camp Trans. "I think one thing that's very important about the protest aspect of Camp Trans is to recognize that excluding trans women from (the) festival hurts more than just the trans women. It hurts other women who'd like to attend but don't because they disagree with the policy. It hurts women who attend the festival without friends or lovers who can't or won't attend. It hurts women who feel guilty about attending while other women can't. It hurts women at the festival who are deprived of the contributions of those women who can't or won't attend. It hurts women's communities that are divided over the issue. It hurts LGBT communities that are forced to choose between supporting the MWMF and respecting trans women. It hurts trans women, who come to feel that we have no place in communities that disrespect us, and it

hurts the communities that alienate trans women."

Ryka Aoki de la Cruz, a Los Angeles based writer and performer, remains optimistic. "Eventually, Michfest will change with the times or lose its relevance. I believe in the womyn's movement, and trust that over all prejudices; eventually we come closer and closer to recognizing and celebrating all womyn, regardless of color, economic, religious, or trans status. To Michfest, I say, get with the times, or get out of the way. In either case, though, where you closed your doors to me,

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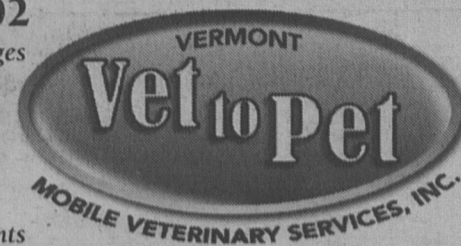
my doors will be open to you. Even estranged sisters are still family, even when it hurts."

This year, Camp Trans follows on the heels of momentous changes within society. Canada has begun to allow same-gender marriages. The U.S. Supreme Court has found sodomy laws to be unconstitutional, no longer making people criminals just because they love someone of the same gender. In addition, more cities and states have passed legislation that protects trans men and trans women from discrimination. In light of these events, MWMF policy of excluding trans women must be seen as backward as well as repressive. Trans women who are able to enter are under the same "don't ask, don't tell" policy that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people experience within the United States military. We should expect more from feminist and progressive spaces than mimicking the more repressive organizations within society that utilizes gender to oppress women and LGBT men and women. ▼

➡ Press release from Camp Trans. To learn more visit the website at [camp-trans.org](http://camp-trans.org).

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