Our culture hates transgender women like me. If a TV is on I can expect to be demeaned as disturbing and laughable, deceptively attractive and tellingly ugly, excessively feminine and unavoidably masculine. These stereotypes are contradictory but persistent. Growing up, even friends repeated them, assuming that no one who would mind could hear, and I was shamed into silence.

People don’t see me. They see dehumanizing images, which influence who they think a trans woman is: certainly not any woman they might know. In reality, we share communities - including queer, feminist, lesbian, and women's communities. We share with other women a need for healing space from a world that tells us, from our earliest memories, that being a girl is less. A world that punishes us for not being something we aren’t with every sort of violence it can muster. In 1976, Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival founder Lisa Vogel advertised her event to fill this need. That Vogel claims a women’s festival was never intended for all women can only mean that at first Vogel mistakenly assumed we weren’t women. Once she realized we’d been attending all along, she added the caveat “womyn-born-womyn” to her definition, rather than examine why it might be that trans women felt the need to be there.

We are crushed under a unique and terrifying blend of sexism and transphobia out here, that murders trans women at a rate several times higher than other queer women. Meanwhile, the hyper-visible Michfest gives credence to the idea that our only refuges should turn us away. We’re not demanding they let us in, but that they stop pushing us out. We’re not invading women’s spaces with men’s bodies, we’re women banished from our own spaces. Any woman with a body has a woman’s body.

To tell a marginalized woman that she’s not welcome in a women’s space because her body upsets you is not body-positive. To judge her an outsider based on a violent patriarchal system of sex assignment is not feminist. To echo conservative paranoia about her isn’t progressive. To attempt to speak in her stead - by wearing a t-shirt and attending a workshop - while paying to
enjoy the institution that silences her, isn't allyship.

I'd love to simply ignore the largest women's gathering in the world, and not be reminded of my second-class status, or listen to misconceptions about my socialization or some projected "male energy." But as a queer, feminist, Michigander woman, it's here in my backyard, and I have to witness my friends speaking with reverence of a place that rejects me. It's so close to home in every sense that it feels like a slap in the face.

I know most of you want to change something you love so that I can love it too. But ask yourselves if, in the absence of our voices, your efforts have been enough. None of this is new. We first had this conversation over twenty years ago when Nancy Burkholder was interrogated and ejected, and every year since. Meanwhile, trans women are jeered, misgendered, publically outed, and in a twist of irony, accused of being abusive for speaking out against our own oppression. The ban has become an "intention," but official statements still reinforce this hostility. After all this time, whom do you still expect to persuade? The year after this first started, a survey found that three quarters of attendees wanted us to stay, but the only changes we see from the organizers today are the mildness of the phrases they substitute for "NO TR***IES." Because Vogel implies that the festival's future is your responsibility and not hers, you want to change her perspective from within. Instead, you are giving your assurance that as long as she feigns progress, you will never be too fed up on our behalf to walk away from the Land you love. The vast majority of you support inclusion. This festival is yours too. Real change will occur when you are willing to stand in solidarity with us until Michfest apologizes and welcomes us home.

As many groups of marginalized women have taught us, there is no "universal woman's experience." But if you do the right thing, this patch of earth could flourish into a source of strength for all women. If the Law of the Land can be changed, this is the only way. And if it can't, what are you doing there? There are other women's festivals that include trans women. Please, don't go to Michfest.

Related Op-Ed from Equality Michigan Executive Director Emily Dievendervd http://www.pridesource.com/article.html?article=67214

Zoe is a trans* rights activist operating out of the Lansing area. Support trans inclusion by signing this petition http://eqmi.us/mwmf14.
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• Facebook Reacts to Return Of HIV In Formerly "Cured" Child
• Same-Sex Couples And The Marriage Penalty
• The Yin Yang Of PRIDE: Much Is Given, Much Required
• Facebook Reacts to Return Of HIV In Formerly