

**WE
ARE
EVERYWHERE**

A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics

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men experience from the heterosexual population, and that such discrimination and/or exclusion is in conflict with the best interests of the larger gay and lesbian community.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE ORGANIZERS OF THE MICHIGAN WOMYN'S MUSIC FESTIVAL

(1992)

Lesbians for Justice

Dear Ms. Vogel & Ms. Price,

Lesbians for Justice is a group of lesbians and allies who, recognizing that all forms of oppression are interrelated, are committed to working toward the elimination of all forms of oppression. As such, we would like to express our disapproval of the expulsion of Nancy Jean Burkholder from the Sixteenth Annual Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in August of 1991, as well as the manner in which it was conducted, and the manner in which you have failed to adequately respond to the issues raised by the incident. It is also our intention to express our disapproval of your policy of excluding post-operative male-to-female transsexuals from attendance at this festival, as well as the absence of adequate due process available to all women in attendance at the festival in any potential dispute regarding festival policy. We feel that the action taken against Ms. Burkholder was arbitrary, unethical and anti-feminist in nature, particularly since this exclusionary policy was not explicitly stated in your festival literature. However, it is also our position that the issue in this situation is not merely whether or not such exclusionary policy was explicitly stated, but that such a policy lacks sufficient justification, and that there is simply no rational basis for the existence of this policy.

We feel that the exclusion of postoperative male-to-female transsexuals from the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival not only lacks justification, but it is likewise contrary to expressed ideals of tolerance and respect for diversity, concern for the safety of attendees, universal sisterhood, and feminist values which you claim the festival is intended to represent, for the following reasons:

- 1.) It is impossible to enforce this policy in a fair and equitable manner, as decisions as to who is and who is not a transsexual ultimately must rely on the discretion of security staff, thus also threatens the safety and security of women of ambiguous gender appearance who are not transsexuals.
- 2.) Such exclusionary policy is necessarily elitist in nature in that it excludes some women while claiming to be a festival for all women.
- 3.) Such exclusionary policy, as well as the manner in which it was enforced, are reminiscent of exclusionary laws, customs, policies and practices based on concepts rooted in patriarchal values of racism, sexism and heterosexism.
- 4.) Such exclusionary policy reflects patriarchal attitudes and values based on

assumptions of biological determinism, which have been used to oppress women, gay men and lesbians for centuries and is therefore inherently anti-feminist in nature.

- 5.) Such exclusionary policy exists to address concerns based in ignorance and bigotry held by a very small minority within the lesbian community, and does not reflect the feelings and opinions of the vast majority of the lesbian community, without whom the existence of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival would not be possible.
- 6.) Transsexual women have attended the festival undetected for many years without causing any disruption or threat to the safety or security of any women in attendance at the festival.
- 7.) Transsexuals have been no less victimized and persecuted by patriarchal society than have been women in general, and in most cases have been so to an even greater degree.
- 8.) Such exclusionary policy unduly and unfairly stigmatizes and marginalizes transsexual women, many of whom are actively involved in, and making valuable contributions to their respective lesbian and feminist communities, in which they are generally overwhelmingly accepted.
- 9.) Any objective criterion utilized to distinguish between post-operative transsexual women and non-transsexual women other than comparison of their respective medical histories would necessarily exclude some non-transsexual women and/or include some transsexual women. This demonstrates that there is no real substantive difference between the two groups according to any relevant criteria, thus such exclusionary policy is necessarily arbitrary in nature.
- 10.) Festival organizers have demonstrated an unwillingness to engage in open and honest debate regarding the issue of transsexual exclusion.

In recognition of the fact that the marginalization and ostracization of transsexual women provides a mirror in which the oppressive elements of the feminist and lesbian communities can see how they perpetuate some of the very social evils and stereotypes that they fight against in the dominant culture. Lesbians for Justice therefore appeals to the organizers of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival to nullify its "womyn-born womyn" only policy; and to allow the attendance of postoperative male-to-female transsexuals at all future festivals.

In addition, Lesbians for Justice is very concerned regarding the lack of due process available to all festival participants, as this is a matter which transcends the issue of transsexual exclusion, and represents a threat to the safety, security and dignity of all women in attendance at the festival. We therefore appeal to festival organizers to establish procedures to ensure adequate due process for all women in attendance at the festival in a fair and democratic manner, addressing not merely the opinions and feelings of festival organizers, but likewise addressing the concerns of festival participants . . .