Statement from Michigan Womyn's Music Festival - 8/1/14

Over the past week, a number of LGBTQ organizations (including Equality Michigan and the Human Rights Campaign) have asserted that the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival ("MWMF") believes transgender womyn are "less than" other womyn, and that the Festival's intention is the equivalent of the U.S. military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. We once again passionately reject these allegations and write to speak our truths.

An intention is a deeply feminist approach to a complex community discussion. It is a purposeful focus that rejects the creation of hard lines; lines that have been used from time immemorial to subjugate and silence all womyn and to "keep them in their place." Ours is a fundamental and respectful feminist declaration 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. As we have said time and time again, we leave the onus on each individual to choose whether or how to respect this intention. Indeed, every year, transgender womyn choose to attend the Festival in the belief that the intention *includes them*.

Acknowledging difference amongst ourselves is a critical part of what the Festival is about. Ignoring these essential places of difference is akin to the political perspective that insists on being "colorblind" or "not seeing race." Considering the different strands of lived experience is, in fact, what allows us to fight the misogyny, transphobia, racism, and other oppressions that weigh upon all of us. The experience of being female, like the experience of being trans, *informs* how we become the womyn we are. Recognizing the inherent differences in these overarching experiences is the true meaning of intersectionality. Gathering around these particular strands of experience is no more discriminatory than womyn from the continent of Africa gathering without African-American womyn, womyn from the U.S. South gathering without womyn from the Pacific Northwest, or working class womyn gathering separately from womyn with class privilege. All of our oppressions are real. To create a hierarchy of oppression that disappears any groups' experience sets us one against the other.

MWMF is not just a party. It is a space wherein females—who have been subjected to all manner of degradation from the moment of their first breath—can unpack and put down the oppressions that are *directly tied to that experience under patriarchy*. The celebration that explodes over the six days of the Festival stems from putting ourselves back together again after the shattering experience of living as gender non-conforming, feminist, queer womyn forced to fit into constraints of what a woman or girl is "supposed to be." In reassembling ourselves at MWMF, the Festival creates a survival toolbox for womyn and girls. These instruments are indispensable in a culture hell-bent on stripping womyn of our ability to reclaim our own sense of selves outside the suffocating gender boxes of "girl" or "woman"; boxes that grow smaller by the day. From the Supreme Court's recent *Hobby Lobby* decision allowing bosses and corporations to deny females fundamental contraceptive access, to the criminalization of pregnant womyn who suffer from addiction, to the kidnapping of over 200 Nigerian girls and forcing them into sex slavery, we are

rapidly returning to the times where females are refused the sanctity of our own bodies, our own autonomy, and our right to simply exist on our own terms.

Equality Michigan has initiated a petition and call to action against the Festival based on misrepresentations, purposeful omissions, and selective editing of prior Festival statements on this issue. In doing so, they are choosing to sidestep the decades long true reason for the Festival's existence – to create an alternative to the debilitating misogynist culture we are all steeped in. We call upon followers of this petition and bloggers reposting Equality Michigan's statements to stop circulating this misinformation and to include our truth. To this end, the Festival offers these simple facts:

- We believe all humans suffer under patriarchy;
- We believe that transgender womyn are womyn;
- We believe that females experience a unique, historical, and debilitating oppression as a class under patriarchy;
- We believe that the subjugation of females is an international phenomenon, experienced across time, culture, nation, class, ethnicity, ability and race;
- MWMF has, since its inception in 1976, formed itself as a space for womyn-born-female as a means to resist and survive the debilitation of female subjugation;
- We believe that support for womyn-born-female space is not at odds with standing with and for the transgender community;
- We believe that the statements calling for the boycott of the MWMF neither speak for all transgender womyn nor include all of their voices, many of whom are silenced or ignored with regard to their support of the Festival's intention of womyn-born-female space, for example, the New Narratives Conference held in Portland, Oregon this Spring. http://newnarratives2014.wordpress.com/

In 2013, the Festival held a series of workshops, called Allies in Understanding, whose sole purpose was to engage in a prolonged and complex discussion about the intention of the Festival as autonomous womyn-born-female space, and to practice and model radical listening communication, where we hear one another through differences. Hundreds of womyn on all sides of the issue attended, including transgender womyn. These workshops will be repeated again in 2014 in a four day series.

As community based LGBTQ and feminist organizations fold one after the other, MWMF remains a miracle; a feminist institution created by the hands, souls, and sweat of the womyn who attend and build it. We do not know what the future holds; the 40th may be our last, the 45th may be our last, or the 50th may be our last. None of that matters today. Our focus and our hearts are in making sure that this Festival, the 39th, inspires and renews the womyn who attend next week.

Our LGBTQ institutions should protect all of our needs for recovery and survival; not cannibalize our mutual needs for liberation. We will not stand by in silence as events are boycotted, lesbian artists are targeted, and community members who attend or support Michigan are bullied into silence and shamed for their love of the Michigan community.

We are not afraid of our differences and disagreements. And we will not back down from our right to define autonomous space for ourselves. The greater liberation of all womyn, which clearly includes trans womyn, is to find where our struggles intersect, and to work towards common goals while respecting and honoring the specificity of our differences. We strive to create a world where we live in solidarity as womyn, sisters in struggle, standing shoulder to shoulder. If our way of working through our differences as a broader LGBTQ community is to recklessly dismantle lesbian feminist institutions, we will all be standing on the bones of our mothers.