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## Trans-misogyny in Dyke Communities: Bitch Isn't the Whole Issue

OMG so I love that I can choose the font for the post, but really, how would people react if I wrote this all in Webdings?

Anyway, this is my first post, and I wanted to follow up some on what Kasey was writing about yesterday and what I put in the comments. I agree with most of what he wrote in his post, but what I also want to talk about is how big the problem of not making queer women's spaces open to trans women is. Spaces for queer women have been so important to me, in so many ways, in my life, and I want all queer women to be able to experience them. I understand that trans women have been an integral part of dyke communities for a very long time, and hopefully will continue to be. What I want, though, is for those dyke communities to validate all women in the ways that feel important to them, and to not erase people's identities in the name of anti-oppression, feminism, and dyke identity.

Before going any further, I want to clarify that I am talking about two distinct, but related, things. First, there are policies, like those at Michigan Womyn's Music Fest (also referred to as MichFest or MWMF), that explicitly exclude trans women. Also, however, there are the ways that we, as people involved in dyke communities, implicitly exclude trans women, not through policies but through how we talk, how we interact, who we value. I understand why so many of us, including me, have focused a lot of our energy on changing this really hurtful policy, because I think it operates both as a barrier to the fest and a larger symbol of the exclusion of women. I can't stop wondering, though, what that means in terms of letting ourselves off the hook for the transphobia and misogyny we are perpetuating in our own scenes, under the radar.

I also want to clarify that I know that dyke/queer women's communities can be alienating to a lot of queer women. I don't for a second want to deny the very real racism, classism, ableism, and other systems of oppression that are playing out in these spaces that make them really hard for a lot of people to be in. I want to work against those forces, also. But I think that what I see happening, also, is that we have this institutional support specifically within the dyke community for the exclusion, active or passive, of trans women. I do not for a second deny that all systems of oppression have institutional support, but I think that the dyke/feminist specificity of trans-misogyny (a term coined by [Julia Serano](#)) differentiates it somewhat.

I am going to post part of a flyer I am making for dyke march (comment if you want to help distribute it!) to respond to some of what I regularly hear in terms of arguments about trans

women in dyke spaces. I am looking for feedback still, but I do feel that it expresses a lot of what I am thinking in pretty well-developed ways (well, as well-developed as you can expect from bullet points).

- First off, patriarchy encourages women to hate each other and not to bond together. Refusing to support trans women totally plays into this. I want to support everyone who is getting directly hurt—not privileged—by the patriarchy.

- If we are excluding trans women on the basis of the bodies they were born with, that scares me. Trans women's bodies are women's bodies. Judging who is and is not an acceptable woman by virtue of the way their body fits into a mold of "feminine" is not okay and is something this community rightfully does not accept when it comes to non-trans women.

- If we are excluding trans women for the years that they did not experience the "shared girlhood" that gets talked about, where do we draw the line? My girlhood is very different than that of someone who grew up in a different country from me, or with different experiences of class or race or ability or many, many other characteristics.

- If we are excluding trans women because they were not "socialized as women," I think that doesn't account for the fact that socialization is happening every day to all of us. I was socialized as a girl when I was 5 and I am being socialized as a woman today. The pressures didn't stop when I hit 18.

- If we are excluding trans women because non-trans women's space is somehow "safer" due to the genitals that are presumed to be present in it, I worry about where that leaves those of us who were abused by women or by people who have similar genitals to us. Who can feel safe in non-trans women-only space seems to be based on this really specific combination of oppression and privilege. Safe space is not defined by what people and genitals are or are not present. Safer spaces are designed by community support, caring, and acceptance. Gender policing and judging works to destroy safer space.

- If we aren't "excluding" trans women, and we just don't happen to know any, I want to know why we don't. How is that related to patriarchy and transphobia? Communities are played out over time by accident. It's usually related to a lot of different ways that oppression has played out over time.

- And finally, and most importantly, I don't want to be excluding trans women because I am not comfortable with what that means we would lose. I know amazing, brilliant, hot, powerful trans women and I don't want to be in a women's community that doesn't have space for them.

This is an intervention, an invocation to all of us, especially non-trans queer women, who are in dyke communities that don't support trans women to try to figure out how we can change that. And it is a message to the trans women who are in our communities, to say, I am so glad you are here and that you are making our community what it is. I am asking us to work to transform our communities. I am saying, maybe it is time to start asking people these questions: Why do you choose to perform at/attend an institution that does not support trans women? If you consider yourself an ally to trans women, what work are you doing from the inside? What are you doing to make sure that your community is supportive of trans women? Do you talk about your dyke identity in relation to certain genital configurations? How can we speak up when we see transphobic things happening? How are we perpetuating transphobia and misogyny?

I could write about this for ages, but I should probably conclude my first post somewhere! I apologize for the length already. I would be very interested to hear people's responses. I am not trying to write this with the idea that other people haven't thought of some or all of this before—I just don't want to alienate people by making assumptions of knowledge, and then not being clear enough to really understand. I am writing all of this from a place of deep love for queer communities and for women. I want my community to have room for people I care about and to help me grow.

Posted by [eliz](#) on 6/05/2007 

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Labels: [misogyny](#), [transphobia](#)

Reactions:  funny ()  interesting ()  cool ()

## 21 comments:

**Anonymous said...**

Welcome to the blog!

6/05/2007 08:40:00 AM

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**alex said...**



nice first post :) welcome to queertoday

6/05/2007 08:59:00 AM

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**mary said...**

great post eliz - this is exactly why I get so riled up about michfest. it's not just a week in the woods!!!

and just cause so many dykes <3 TRANNYBOIZ does not mean they "are inclusive of" transwomen.

I will pass out flyers with you at the march!

6/05/2007 02:50:00 PM

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**eliz said...**



thanks for the warm welcome! and mary, if you are who i think you are, did you get my special personal request for you to help me? either way, i am really glad you want to help! you can email me at miller elizabeth ann at gmail. thank you so much! and, thank you to everyone reading and thinking about these things.

6/05/2007 04:33:00 PM

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**Anonymous said...**

Has anyone read the statement on [www.bostondykemarch.com](http://www.bostondykemarch.com)? It says they support trans inclusion. As far as I know they have always been trans inclusive in the past. I guess it is something to think about.

6/06/2007 05:15:00 AM

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**Mark D. Snyder said...**



Anonymous,

FYI: We pointed out the pro-trans policies of the dyke march several times including the post entitled "why we love the dyke march" last week ;)

We still support and love the dyke march.

6/06/2007 09:45:00 AM

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**Anonymous said...**

Interviewer: Do you get shit from the trans community for playing at Michigan?

Bitch: Yes, from parts of the trans community. People who think there aren't trans people at Michigan are so fucked up. If someone tries to tell me [Michigan] is transphobic, I tell them to stuff it. There's so many trannies there. And it's not trans people being marginalized. It's people who were born as men. The festival is for people who suffered a girlhood. That's all it is. They're not trying to redefine what women are. I think it's really ironic, I don't see nearly as much activism around all male gatherings. I'm sure everybody over at Camp Trans are not protesting all the all-male gatherings that happen all over the country all the time. It is so the patriarchy. I'm so over it. I think it's totally the patriarchy and it's complete ageism.

Interviewer: How so?

Bitch: Because going to Michigan is like going to another country. These visionaries set up Michigan for six fucking days out of the year. It's not like they're trying to make a city. They want to have a party with only these kinds of people. They're our elders. They had a vision. When I was younger, I had a stereotype of what an older lesbian was. I thought they were nerdy, wearing purple all the time and walking around with their hand drum that they can't play. And then when I went there I had my mind blown by what an intellectual, what a survivalist community it was. If my elders want to say for these six days only these kinds of women can come, then I need to respect that. It is so against our nature to respect women for having boundaries. I think that's exactly what's happening.

I had the same experiences as a white girl at Michigan. I felt blown away that I couldn't go to the women of color events. I felt very entitled about it and very pissed off. And then I had to be schooled about it. I met this Black woman at a meeting and I told her I wanted to go to that, I feel it would educate me to be less racist. And she said sometimes people need to section off and they need to be with people who've had similar experiences so they can come out into the bigger community and be stronger people. I really had to respect that.

When me and Animal were on the scene, the three bands that people were going after were Bitch & Animal, The Butchies and Le Tigre. Ironically enough, the three bands that all have trans people in them, calling us transphobic. When I think of all of the girl energy/the raised female energy going into protesting that event when they could be getting the education of a lifetime and coming out into the bigger world and being such amazing trans activists. I would never go to a Black Women only event and demand that I be let in. I support us respecting our elders' boundaries.

6/06/2007 10:56:00 AM

eliz said...



actually, i feel like the dyke march's statement sort of supports my points. for anyone who doesn't want to go to the website, the dyke march statement reads as follows:

**THE BOSTON DYKE MARCH URGES ALL GROUPS TO SUPPORT TRANS-INCLUSION**

*The Boston Dyke March is committed to being proactively trans-inclusive. The Boston Dyke March welcomes transwomen and transmen to join the organizing committee, attend all Dyke March events, and participate in the Dyke March. The Boston Dyke March Committee is publicly opposed to woman-born-women only policies that exclude transpeople. The Dyke March is for everyone!*

i have two major problems with this statement.

1), we are not talking about trans people in general. we are talking about trans women in particular. i think that erasing the specificity of trans women's experience, which, yes, involves transphobia, but is also so informed by misogyny, and how they interact. w/w policies in specific, and queer women's communities in general, may keep trans men out in name, but in practice in many of those spaces are positive and/or welcoming to trans men (see [this article](#) for details). for me, anyway, this is not a fight about trans people being accepted and supported in queer women's space. this is a fight about queer women being accepted and supported in queer women's space, and some queer women are trans. NOT that that is not an important part of their identity, and not that i think it should have to be erased in order to be in that space, but that to me, the reason that it matters so deeply to me that trans women be a part of my queer women's space is that they are women.

2), i don't think that saying that you are "committed to being proactively trans-inclusive" is the same thing as having supporting trans women and other trans people be a really integral part of the decisions you are making. i sort of feel like the statement is more of a "look! we are good! now trans people can come here and you can stop being so upset!" whereas to me, being proactively trans inclusive involves centering those values in every decision you make, cos the thing is, a lot of the dyke community is not particularly supportive of trans women, and so it does take work.

that said! my main points were actually what i just said—that to support trans women, we have to be really critical of the dyke culture around us, and that is an every day, every moment decision that we have to make if we are committed to having communities that value women.

thank you for yr comments! and in some ways i am glad the dyke march put up a statement. one i would rather see also involves the sentence, "We are sorry we invited Bitch to perform. We didn't know about or take into account things she had said and places she had performed. We apologize to the people our decision has hurt and excluded. In the future, we are committed to the following criteria when selecting performers:" and then list whatever anti-oppressive guidelines would work in this context.

thanks again!

6/06/2007 11:14:00 AM

Anonymous said...

I find this statement troubling as well. It is unfortunate that that the dykemarch did not cancel her performance. :(


6/06/2007 11:44:00 AM

Anonymous said...

did the dyke march organizers put something out in response to letters about Bitch performing? I really love the dyke march and hope that they will move to have a better policy in the future about inviting artists that play at michfest. I also realize that at the march and in many other places where queer women gather there is still work to be done to be welcoming and/or inclusive, and not negate the experience of queer transwomen or make them invisible. we as a queer women's community have a lot of work to do. thanks for the discussion

6/06/2007 01:22:00 PM

eliz said...

 i am not sure if the statement on the dykemarch website was a direct response to the letters, but i know i have not gotten an individual response to my letter. i appreciate your comment and the really important point of not erasing the presence of queer trans women who are already a part of queer women's community. thank you for your comment.

6/06/2007 01:25:00 PM


Anonymous said...

Thank you for a wonderful post. It meant a lot to me.

- Stacey Montgomery

6/06/2007 11:19:00 PM

eliz said...

 stacey,  
thank you for all the work you have done in the boston dyke communities for years and years. i really appreciate it. i am glad you liked the post.

6/07/2007 09:54:00 AM

Anonymous said...

Dear me, I certainly hope that the statement added to the Boston dyke march web site is not the extent of their response to this. In fact, I wish it hadn't even been a part of it. I was going to make a response to it last night, then checked it again, and saw that it had been removed from their site, which got me hoping that that meant that maybe they were rethinking it. But this morning, it has reappeared, and in a slightly worse form.

My biggest problem is the claim that they're "committed to being proactively trans-inclusive." No, that's not going to fly at this point. I'm entirely willing to give the benefit of the doubt that no one on the committee knew about Bitch's outspoken anti-transwomen track record. Issues of hating trans women and issues of excluding trans women in dyke communities are pretty marginal in our world, for most people, even amongst those involved in dyke community, which is itself marginal to begin with. And that's part of what's fucked up here, is how those issues are so marginalized, and that's a part of people are responsible for learning about this and growing and working for a more just world. Therefore I am willing to give the benefit of the doubt that the committee may have been clueless. However, I have a really hard time believing that they were both "committed to being proactively trans-inclusive" and clueless. Again, these issues are marginalized a lot, but most people who are *honestly* are "proactive" about the issues are going to know at least something about the problems with Bitch. And the idea that an entire committee of, I don't know, maybe 10-20 people "committed to being proactively trans-inclusive" having no idea? That's pretty hard to believe.

The dyke march committee fucked up this year. And this is a fuck-up that hurts queer community, and acts against the values that the dyke march claims to stand for. What we need in order to heal and move on is an acknowledgment of this fuck-up, an apology about it, and a commitment to strive for better in the future. What we don't need is a rubbing-salt-in-the-wounds type of statement that claims being "proactively" involved in issues that flagrantly weren't being prioritized, makes no mention of the error in judgement, and gives no sign that this is something that will be taken into account to any greater extent in the future. The current statement seems to do nothing other than to serve as an attempt to evade responsibility. It's really sad.

I said earlier that the web site statement got worse this morning, and perhaps some are wondering what I meant by that. I noticed two changes. One was changing the sentence "The Boston Dyke March is **committed** to being proactively trans-inclusive" to "The Boston Dyke March **has always been and continues to be committed** to being proactively trans-inclusive" (I **bolded** the part that changed). I guess there needed to be that extra emphasis that the committee has never for a second stopped prioritizing these issues! The other change was removing this sentence: "The Boston Dyke March Committee is publicly opposed to woman-born-women only policies that exclude transpeople." Because, you know, I guess even that one actual small but concrete gesture of commitment to the issue was too much, a little too "edgy" perhaps. Sigh, really sad about this...

6/07/2007 12:58:00 PM

Janine deManda said...



why are implicit exclusions duly noted, but not given anything approaching the same level of collective outrage by those not excluded by them? why are non-trans queer women lining up to condemn dyke community institutions that exclude trans women, but monosexual queer

women aren't doing the same for bi queer women? white queer women for non-white queer women? economically privileged queer women for poor and working poor queer women?

and why is the outlet for this outrage assaults on these institutions? i may not agree with the mwmf's policy or everything bitch says about it, but i sure as hell appreciate the value of a queer women's cultural institution that has weathered 35 plus years.

why is the solution to the policy issue to work to shut down the festival and anyone who attends or performs here? why is this not approached the way the fest's other exclusions have been coped with - 'cuz they're still not solved by any stretch, but i don't hear anyone deriding folks who perform there for doing so despite the ongoing racism and classism and other issues ever present.

no community and no aspect of community has clean hands. if anyone is pretending they and theirs do, then they are essentially precluding any actual progress.

if we want a queer women's community that doesn't make everyone who is anything other than non-trans, white, monosexual, able-bodied, middle class, and between 25 and 35 feel unsafe, unwanted, and unwelcome, then we bloody well need to start by copping to the dirt on our own hands AND giving more than lipservice to the panoply of exclusions in addition to that of trans women.

6/07/2007 04:22:00 PM

**Anonymous said...**

Janine:

I agree that some of the issues you bring up are important, but I think that you're making a fair number of false assumptions and unfair accusations.

The campaign around MichFest's womyn-born-womyn policy has been aimed at ending the policy, not ending the entire festival. The boycott aspect of the campaign is intended to apply pressure towards this end, not as a permanent end in itself.

It also sounds like you're making an assumption that every voice here opposed to trans women exclusion is a non-trans queer woman's voice, but only some of these people have identified themselves as such.

It's very true that there are big issues of ongoing racism and classism and other things at MichFest, along with so many other queer and non-queer institutions (as you said), and I agree that it's important that those be addressed. But personally I have seen lots of work to address those. And there certainly must be more work done, but acting as though trans issues are the only ones getting any effort or attention is quite untrue, in my opinion.

So far as the wondering why the boycott campaign has come out of trans activism and not other issues, my opinion is that it is because exclusion of trans women has been institutionally enforced in an explicitly targeted way, making it a very clear target for clear activism. As far as I know, no one has been actively expelled or denied entrance to MichFest for being a person of color, being beneath a certain class status, etc. Many of the other issues don't have as clear of a target and goal, but require a lot of important work nonetheless. That is just my guess as to why tactics differ.

I think that every other issue that you bring up is really important, but I just don't think that presenting them with a slew of false assumptions and misinformed accusations are an effective or useful place from which to promote working on those issues.

6/07/2007 04:48:00 PM

**eliz said...**



i don't want to speak for anyone else, but i **don't** want to shut down michfest. i actually really want to attend michfest, but won't feel okay with doing so until all the women who i love and value are allowed to do so.

i do want to handle this like other issues have been handled--inside the fest. there is so much work that still needs to be done there from my understanding on all sorts of oppressions, but it is happening with people inside the fest figuring it out. it is not an issue of people being literally kept out, so that issues like this have to get addressed in public forums. in my history with MWMF organizing, i have seen so many different tactics being used--talking directly to lisa vogel (the organizer of the fest), participants inside trying to organize, artist boycotts, etc. and nothing is working and so we keep trying new avenues. but none of this is in an effort to shut down fest. it is in an effort to make it open to more people.

i fully agree with your main point--we have a lot of shit to work through as dyke communities and we do need to be committed to that. i just think that we need to be working on all those things at the same time, because even tho systems of oppression operate differently, they are so interlinked. and i can't focus all my energy on one issue. the ways that people are being excluded, marginalized, and unsupported extends way beyond trans status.

i mostly wanted to just clarify--which i tried to do in my piece, but did not succeed in, i suppose--that i do value and support women's spaces. i do not want to eliminate any of them, nor any woman-focused spaces, for that matter. i just want to work to ensure that as

many women as possible have access to them. and again, i agree that means more than just looking at the exclusion of trans women. but that is a vital part of it, and one brought up very clearly by the dyke march process.

thanks for your comment!

[6/07/2007 04:55:00 PM](#)

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**Trevor said...**

What a great first post, welcome to the blog!!!!!!

[6/07/2007 10:27:00 PM](#)

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**Shea said...**


 "his is not a fight about trans people being accepted and supported in queer women's space. this is a fight about queer women being accepted and supported in queer women's space, and some queer women are trans."

Fuck Yeah!! Thank you eliz I don't think you could have said it any better.

[6/08/2007 09:19:00 AM](#)

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**bran said...**

 As a femmy queer black trans man this post meant a lot to me too. I have all too often heard dismissive comments about trans women. Not many people seem to think about the trauma trans woman sometimes face by being forced into male roles and masculinity as children or young adults.

At a retreat inclusive of all women, my partner a trans woman of color who broke down while sharing how she had always wanted to have sleep overs and bond the way all the other little girls did, instead she was violently forced into conforming and missed out on "girlhood" not really benefiting from male supremacy in the ways so many do.

There are too many ways in which different parts of the community are dismissive of how we are all hurt by institutional oppression though to very different degrees. I have grown up with feminist queer trans woman and am so tired of hearing them be told to create their own spaces because they are not welcome in domestic violence shelters, or music festivals due to "assumed" childhood experiences or "assumed" genitalia is seen as a threat to the safety of non-trans woman. For me entering a space of mostly white people I feel extremely unsafe, the history of violence, dehumanization and genocide of those with white skin and class privilege is long and continues in different ways today (prisons, media, courts, schools).


I Just want people to think about how and why so many of us feel a need to enforce gender rules and uphold white supremacy and understand their connections to each other. When colonizers first came here some of the first people they killed were two-spirit people or people who we may see as trans or gender queer. There is a reason we play into the need to define gender for other people and it is old brutal and rooted in white/male supremacy. Thank you Eliz for creating a space to reflect.

Wanted to recommend Whipping Girl, Trans Warriors and My Gender Workbook.

[10/17/2008 02:25:00 PM](#)

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**bran said...**

 Correction: My partner is a trans guy who met this trans woman. Needed to clarify that. I generally like to speak only from my own experiences, she really touched and shaped our lives so I wanted to share.

[10/17/2008 02:29:00 PM](#)

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