

# Reception of Transgender Women in Online Lesbian Spaces



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## Introduction

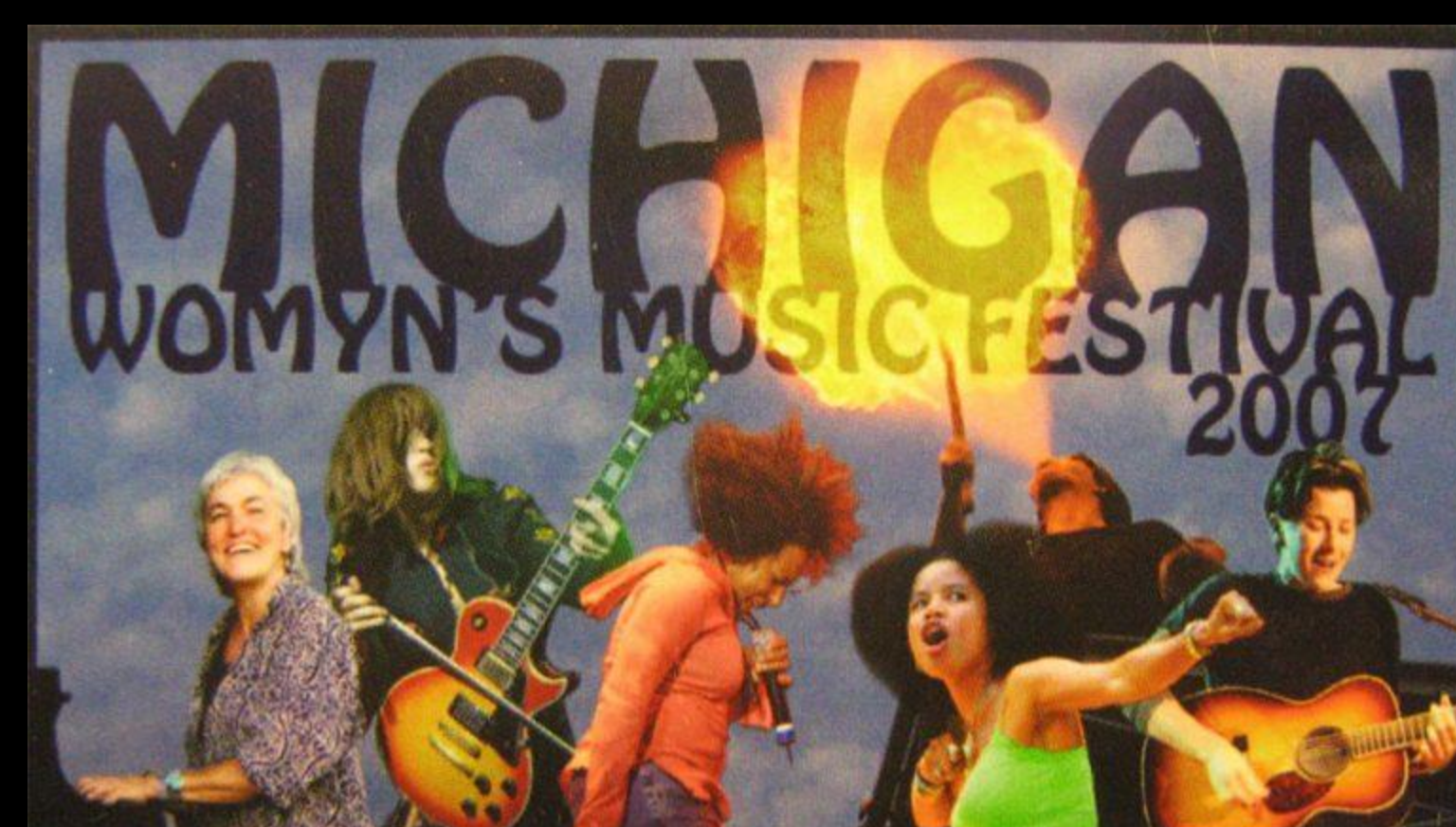
Offline interactions between transgender and cisgender women-loving-women have been well-documented. However, as online communities become more crucial to queer individuals, there is still very little research on online interactions among lesbians. Research question: How are transgender women received in online spaces made by and for women who love women?

## Research on Transgender and Cisgender Lesbians

- Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire* popularized the idea that transgender women divide the feminist movement in the 1980s (Gailey and Brown 2016).
- Gay and Lesbian identities seen as opposite of transgender identity, so gay transgender individuals were not often recognized at the time (Gailey and Brown 2016).
- Michigan Womyn's Festival's womyn-born-womyn policy led to boycotts of transgender people and cisgender allies. Set up Camp Trans as protest venue (Beemyn and Eliason 2016) Michfest's last year was 2015; they refused to change their policy.
- Lesbian scholars have recently been redefining the lesbian identity to be more dynamic and inclusive of transgender individuals. (Tate 2012)
- The focus on transphobia from the lesbian community gets a lot of attention because it is queer infighting.
- The relationship between cisgender and transgender women-loving-women is complicated, as communities define the lesbian identity and its history differently.
- Transgender women-loving-women's historical contribution to the lesbian community has yet to be widely recognized, but more lesbian spaces are accepting transgender women.



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## Research on LGBT+ Individuals and the Internet

- Despite the significance of online spaces for LGBT+ individuals, there is little research on the interaction between cisgender and transgender women-loving women within online spaces.
- People who identify as LGBT+ are more likely to use social media than non-LGBT+ individuals (Craig et al. 2014).
- Online platforms make it easier for LGBT+ individuals to connect with and support each other in ways that may not be safe or acceptable to do offline in their areas (McInroy et al. 2019).
- Online spaces also carry dangers, such as cyberbullying and misinformation on queer and sex education that is not likely to be corrected offline (Ingram et al. 2017).

## Focusing on Reddit

- Online spaces are necessary for many queer people to communicate with each other when offline options are limited (Craig et al. 2014). Social media platforms like Reddit facilitate this communication.
- Reddit's popularity and design as a collection of message boards makes it simple to locate communities and observe their boundary maintenance amongst other communities.
- Its communities are monitored by moderators, but the anonymous voting system on posts and comments gives users power over the Subreddit's popular content and welcoming atmosphere (Seering et al. 2019; Squirrel 2019).



## Methodology and Next Steps

- This study will interview 20 transgender women-loving-women who are members of the popular lesbian Subreddit "r/actuallesbians."
- Participants will be recruited using a both online solicitation and snowball sampling.
- Participants will be asked about:
  1. How welcomed they feel in r/actuallesbians
  2. Their online experiences on Reddit, relating to their identity and their communities
  3. If they feel that online queer women's spaces are more or less comfortable than offline ones.
- This study will use tenets of grounded theory to guide its data analysis

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