

For Want of a Single Word
Anne Elizabeth Moore

The correct word doesn't exist. "Feminism"—long falsely maligned with humorlessness, a situation we can't even pretend to truck with over here at Ladydrawers HQ, but more seriously in a very real sense a term that advocates for the feminine by *necessity*, which hardly helps those of us negotiating a transition from feminine to masculine, or wanting to inhabit some ambiguous space between the two—this term in other words doesn't quite get at the way gender really does impact one's ability to move through the world if one feels oneself to be anything less than fully masculine. Not to mention how many very weird anti-woman activities are getting called "feminist" these days. Moreover this term, however important it is, does overlook the myriad other ways oppression occurs, which, although in *our* findings gender is a primary determining factor in wage and opportunity inequity, it is not by any means the only one. "Anti-racist" is an equally necessary concept but simply doesn't reflect a movement that is not so much *against* anything but truly *for* a lot of things, just things you maybe don't think about so much, like the fact that deeply embedded but provably untrue beliefs about personality traits, intelligence, or general value can be linked to skin color in the minds of some and then treated as if verifiable for hundreds of years, even to people who know this and want to make it stop. "Anti-oppression" is a term that gets a little closer to what is called for, but is still *anti-something*, in this case *anti-things-that-themselves-are-anti*, which: why? That's not helpful. We need a word. A single, solid word that is joyful and true and not confusing, unlike "intersectional," which is a term that could apply to just about any two ways of thinking about the world that overlap, much like the intersectional concerns of people who like cats and people who like dogs. You know? One of those ways of thinking about the world is just wrong. Like I even have to say that to you. A single word is necessary, one that acknowledges both the struggles for women's rights and the struggles for trans* rights, in fact one that abolishes oppression based on gender at all and of course based on sexual preference and in fact also eliminates racial bias and discrimination and that monster that is behind both of these called racism, and ageism, and ableism, and this single word would have to connote the severe and very real economic factors that are the endgame of all these "isms," that, in this country at least—the United States of America—are the very real and very clear result of several different forms of oppression until we also start considering rape and sexual assault and non-sexual assault and public health crises and dental hygiene and poor fashion choices that all combined are the profound and total result of how capitalism doles out rewards in terms of money, but directly impacts bodily integrity and self-esteem and general well-being and then of course we also have to talk about how that economy is structured and who is rewarded within it and who is not and by that I mean labor and by labor I don't mean a job you go to from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day and clock in and then clock out and the rest of the time you have a regular life because *who even does that anymore?* By labor I just mean whatever you do for money like for example walking dogs or drawing Gay Batman or having sex with people you don't know very well or, like, writing essays, all of these and all of the others are what I mean by labor, the primary problem being that these different varieties of oppression are focused on identity and difference and anger and frustration but they don't really get at the joy of the thing I want to describe to you, the thing that this missing word needs to *mean*: the thrill of discovery and of community, the giddiness of relief after such a torrent of rage for so long that you have finally seen its ridiculousness in all its full, shining glory! And once seen, the moment when you can do nothing but laugh anymore because FUUUUCCCCCKKKK it is all simply too amazing and hilarious and horrible to comprehend without perceiving it as *funny*.

If this word existed, I wouldn't have to write this essay describing the impetus behind The Ladydrawers' summer program. You would understand already that such creative investigations would be necessary; that there is love in fact-finding and information sharing, and that joy is founded on an understanding that something has gone wrong in the way some people get treated by other people and it is our duty—mine, and yours—to figure out how to make it stop. You would understand this because our culture would have valued this as a concept so highly that we would have the vocabulary to say it in only a word, to be able to communicate conveniently the idea: *I am someone who values you already. Now. What shall we do together?*

BIO

The Ladydrawers Comics Collective (AKA "The Ladydrawers") is an unofficially affiliated group of women, men, trans*, and non-binary gender folk who research, perform, and publish comics and texts about how economics, race, sexuality, and gender impact the comics industry, other media, and our culture at large. Our data comes from original research conducted in the public realm by students, interns, volunteers, and supporters around the globe. Our content—including comic books, strips, posters, postcards, games, and various forms of media—is created by a range of folks interested in, and with a range of experiences in, the comics industry and the art world at large, including long-time, established professionals and recent enthusiasts. Our projects have been commissioned by the publications *Tin House*, *Annalemma*, and *Bitch*, and appears regularly in our monthly column on *Truthout*. We have also conducted projects in conjunction with Our Bodies Ourselves and other social-justice minded, information-disseminating organizations. Many of our collaborations begin in classes at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago or Ox-Bow School of Art. We have lectured at Northwestern University's Sex Week, at the Chicago Alternative Comics Expo (CAKE), at the Chicago Cultural Center (for the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Chicago Artists' Resource), at the Cambodian Association of Illinois, and at the Pop Culture and World Politics Conference at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. In addition, last summer we implemented a two-week experimental graduate program at the Adventure School for Ladies called the Comics Intensive.

Here's what the press has to say about us:

"Beautifully illustrated intellectual ammunition." —ThinkProgress

"Depressing news, but the comic makes it a little easier to swallow." —Bitch

"Making an art form out of researching and publishing findings that others might write or talk about." —Women's E-News

"Wry." —New York Times Magazine

Other stories about The Ladydrawers have appeared in media outlets including: *Jezebel*, *Express Milwaukee*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, *The Matthew Filipowicz Show*, *New City*, *Chicago Publishes*, an unknown Dutch website, *Examiner*, *Comics Beat*, and on WBEZ's *Vocalo*.

We are a curiosity-driven, open-ended, exploratory body of friendly amateur researchers,

concerned with who gets to say what in our culture and how they may or may not be supported in or compensated for saying it. Our monthly comic strip on Truthout, which draws between several thousand to nearly a hundred thousand of readers, both documents and illustrates our findings for the public at large; it also pays underrepresented artists to make comics in a field where it can be difficult to make money as a woman or trans* person. In April of 2010, we also published our data on women's comics anthologies in a pamphlet called *Women's Comics Anthology*; conducted an internationally debated postcard campaign in May of 2011; released a limited-edition print anthology now available online in July of 2011 called *Unladylike*; and put out a book in conjunction with the Adventure School in June of 2012 called *Hand Job: A Labor of Love*. This summer's exhibition and workshop program explores comics, art, and other forms of cultural production as vehicles for addressing gender, race, sex, and money.

We are nice, and funny. We like, and want to work with, everybody. We want everyone to be happy. And we will work really hard with them to make sure that's possible.