Everyone’s different, so not everyone’s going to agree about whether feminism is still relevant or necessary. I mean, if you’re a middle class, college educated white lady with a sensitive white guy boyfriend and you feel liberated cuz you have a hyphenated last name, maybe you feel like the coast is clear and that women are no longer oppressed and we don’t need feminism anymore. I’m only saying this because I read this blurb about how Venus magazine has changed hands and how the new publisher says that feminism is outdated and no longer relevant to their magazine. I’m not an avid Venus reader so this decision barely affects me at all, but it did make me want to use the space I have to explain why I think that the idea that feminism is irrelevant is bullshit.

Even though I’m black and gay, I don’t really identify as oppressed because I live in the U.S. and I can live where I want and travel around and I have a roof over my head and I’ve had a lucky life with relatively minor things to complain about. But I don’t feel like we still need feminism because I specifically believe that all women are oppressed relative to men (I believe something way more complicated about that relationship that would take a whole other column to explain). I believe that-
feminism is still relevant because it speaks to the necessity to
generally redefine power in our society and globally. If you’ve
read any news lately, how can you not agree that we obviously
need a new understanding of power if we want any peace?

When we were starting the Portland chapter of Anarchist
People of Color in 2003, I remember sitting in the small
group that comprised us, talking about how we wanted to
define ourselves. You know, one of those boring activist
conversations that seems to never end, but that we were 100%
invested in having at the time. I remember talking about how
even though I considered myself an anarchist, in my heart,
I identified with feminism the most and I wanted that to
somehow be reflected in our organization. Luette, my fellow
organizer (who I recently just got back in touch with: Hey,
girl!), expressed that there were aspects of feminism that she
just couldn’t relate to. She was probably thinking of Andrea
Dworkin! I told her I felt the same way about anarchism,
picturing Rick Mackin and his ilk, in all their manarchist
glory. We decided to compromise and define ourselves as an
anarcho-feminist group, and since then I’ve been able to see
more and more clearly—in theory and in real life—how these
two concepts work together and help us think of new ways to
redistribute and rethink power dynamics. We decided to take
the best of both of those worlds and leave the rest behind.

I could use war, or border politics or the U.S. Government as
examples of why and how anarcho-feminist ideas can change
your community and the world, but I’m going to use a far more
simple example. And why not get personal since the personal
is indeed political?

As you may well know, I set up shows in New Orleans for
queer, female-fronted, and all-girl bands who pass through
town on tour. I started doing it a year ago and at that point, I
envisioned it as a collective. I set up a website for networking
with bands & individuals and handed the password out to
every girl or queer person I knew who was interested. I
ten find mysterious and off-putting. I hope that event marks a 
change in the way NMF operates in this town from now on.

I want to give a shout out to the Bloody Rag Collective that 
is putting on shows for bands with women and trans folks in 
Chicago. I admire your collective approach and maybe one of 
these days we can overcome geography and join forces some-
how.

played music with lots of different women, and did my best 
to encourage them to start bands, have confidence in their 
skills and be involved with putting on shows. I got some help 
with flyering here and there, but mostly I did everything on 
my own. After months of operating that way, it inevitably 
became my "baby." I’m having fun doing it, and the process 
feels simple enough. I didn’t realize until I talked to this fellow 
lady punk I know named Rachel the other day that a lot of 
women find the process of setting up a show daunting partly 
because of the technical aspects of it, for example, running a 
PA. I’ve been doing this stuff for a while now, and honestly I 
forgot that different people are at different stages of learning 
about it. I had actually begun to assume that most people 
weren’t really interested in the process.

For me, being a feminist means, in part, learning not to put 
the idea of expertise on a pedestal. (Who knows, maybe this is 
something DIY culture taught me but I’m crediting it to femi-
nism now. I guess in the end, it’s all one and the same to me.) 

Somehow along the way, I realized that prioritizing technical 
knowledge over experiential knowledge is patriarchal. It’s like 
how you might have a girl friend who never claims to know 
how to play music even though you’ve seen her play guitar in 
her bedroom a million times. What is that perceived gap 
between playing music and calling yourself a musician? What 
does it mean to “know how” to do something? Why isn’t the ac-
tion of doing something evidence that you know how to do it? 
Why do people, especially women, convince themselves that 
they don’t know how to do things they already do? Why is it 
perceived that there is only one correct way to do something 
and that you probably need to take lessons or read a manual in 
order to learn it? (Is that enough questions for ya?)

Knowledge really is power. Convincing yourself or allowing 
yourself to be convinced that you don’t or can’t know things is 
dis-empowering. I recently checked out this book from the Iron 
Rail called The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance,
Solidarity by Amy Allen. In all honesty, it’s a little bit dry but not overly academic, so if you’re excited about the topic, it’ll be a pretty easy read. Plus, it’s pretty short, and it’s especially great if you’ve read this kind of thing before but you need a refresher because it’s pretty straight-to-the-point.

Allen breaks down three ways of defining power: as a resource, as domination and as empowerment. Feminists who think of power as a resource are basically the ones who think of Hillary Clinton as their saviour. They see power as a resource that has been unequally distributed and they think everything will be fine once women have as much access to power as men. They want more female CEOs and politicians. They don’t see anything wrong with the power structure as long as women have an equal place in it. They are dying to wear pantsuits—definitely not going to create the kind of change in the world that I’d like to see.

Feminists who see power as domination define all women as oppressed compared to all men. They wish to end male domination and see power as something defined only by patriarchal violence and the subjugation of women. This conception of power is very black & white and relies on a strict dichotomy, and it doesn’t do a very good job accounting for how race, class and numerous other factors change the experience of power for men and women. Plus, not everyone’s either a man or a woman, right? This idea of power is compelling, but not the real deal.

Then there’s the idea of power as empowerment. I was talking to this woman Gia, who helps to run a woman of color lead space in New Orleans called Gris Gris Lab and she said she doesn’t like the word “empowerment” and prefers to talk about “building power.” We didn’t get to go in depth about it, but I assume she thinks that saying “empower” can give the idea that the group or individual you’re referring to has no power and needs to be given power from an outside source. Obviously, that’s not what I believe and I don’t think that’s what Amy Allen is getting at, either.

Empowerment is just a new way to define power—not as domination, but as “the ability to transform oneself, others, and the world,” writes Allen. It means that if you have confidence, skills or knowledge, you don’t lord it over other people or use it to bolster your own ego, you share it. The secret surprise is that you also get it back. It’s about seeing power as a nurturing force in the world. Allen writes that the main influence for this idea of empowerment is motherhood (in it’s most ideal incarnation)—fostering growth, not submission through domination. This type of power benefits everyone, not just women, and it can be applied to a variety of relationships, not just ones between women and men. It also works really well with anti-authoritarian and non-hierarchical ways of organizing ourselves. Power to the people, not over the people, right? This is an old idea that has yet to gain the popularity it deserves.

Tell me, how are these ideas no longer relevant? Until they are widespread and mainstream, they will continue to be relevant.

Anyway, back to my story. I am unintentionally hogging No More Fiction but I’ve realized that, and I’m ready to turn it over to the people in the interest of empowering queer punks and lady punks to create their own events and spaces in this city. Combining ideas about anti-authoritarianism with feminist ideas about redefining power should be central to the work we do, no matter how small the project. Even if I’m not psyched on putting on yet another folk-punk show, maybe that’s an opportunity for another queer punk or lady punk to get practice putting on a show. Of course it’s a two way street—people have to be interested and put in work to be involved. We’re going to have a skillshare for queers & women this Thursday to share knowledge about the technical aspects of music that people of-