



Fact: Feminists Aren't Just Funny, They're Hysterical

STORY BY THE HYSTERICS COLLECTIVE

You may be familiar with the trope that feminists are humourless. Consider the joke: How many feminists does it take to screw in a light bulb? To which the feminist responds, “that’s not funny.” The Hysterics Collective, along with the hilarious comics we invite to perform, effectively counter this tired and unfunny narrative. Feminists are funny. In fact, we’re hysterical!

The Hysterics Collective is a not-for-profit feminist comedy collective based in Katarokwi/Kingston. We’re here to transform stages into inclusive spaces. We’re here to have fun. We’re here to laugh. And we’re here to assert an anti-oppressive presence within comedy. The collective is currently composed of four friends: Carina Magazzeni, Robin Alex McDonald, Lindsay Rodgers, and Rachel Williamson. We created the collective back in 2018, directly informed by Rodgers’ doctoral research in Cultural Studies at Queen’s University. Her dissertation, “Not A Joke: Women’s Work and Feminist Stand-Up Comedy” (2020), celebrates funny women, with a focus on live feminist stand-up comedy, the shared laughter it generates, and the cultural and political work it enacts. Her research included attending stand-up comedy shows produced and performed by women, and asking these performers about their craft. The shows she studied included those by Crimson Wave, Ebony Tide, Laugh Your Butts Off, SHADE, So Fresh N’ So Clean, and Yas Kween.

These shows were our first women-centric, live, stand-up comedy experiences, and they left powerful impressions on the four of us. The shows expanded our understanding of what comedy could be and cultivated in us a desire to produce our own shows. Since then, The Hysterics Collective has been nurtured by a shared passion for good comedy produced by and for those with “a tendency to cause trouble” within the mainstream comedic narrative.

Our shows aim to bring audience and performers together in a process of coming to know about one another, recognizing that, as Sara Ahmed writes in *Living a Feminist Life*, “the personal is structural,” or, what happens to me happens to you, too. Ahmed writes about humour as a feminist tool, and says that, “Feminist laughter can lighten our loads.” The ability to laugh together requires sharing a perspective. We feel affirmation and rejoice when we can laugh without restraint at a joke because it resonates with our experiences and our perspectives, especially when others often deny, marginalize, and reject these perspectives.

Generating laughter takes work — especially if you want it to raise feminist consciousness. While each member of The Hysterics Collective is uniquely hilarious, we tend to focus more on the production side of things. Our comedy shows are accessibly priced via a pay-what-you-can model; hosted and performed by emerging/up n’ coming comedians who are paid professional artist fees; informed by a practice and ethics of care, and having fun together; and introduced by an open mic session so that local blossoming comics can share the stage. Since forming the collective, we have produced three comedy shows at The Grad Club:



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JUST A JOKE (2018) featuring Ashley Moffatt, Aba Amuquandoh, Ana-Marija Stojic and Definition of Knowledge; HOPES & DREAMS (2018) featuring Shirley Whalen, Carol Zoccoli, Coko & Daphney, and Courtney Gilmour; and LAUGH IT UP (2019) featuring Tranna Wintour, Nour Hadidi, Amy Bugg, Isabel Zaw-Tun, and Stephanie Pangowish. Support from the community has been tremendous and allowed these shows to flourish. We look forward to future days of rubbing shoulders and collectively cackling within the sweet embrace of The Grad Club.

During the pandemic, we have been unable to produce the types of live shows that we love and crave, and have been busy brainstorming alternative modes of comedy delivery. We’re looking forward to laughing out loud (and online) in an upcoming collaboration with Agnes Etherington Art Centre. Supported by their programming team, we plan to work with comedians to create a series of videos that riff off artworks within the art museum’s exhibitions and permanent collection. In virtual spaces and beyond, we look forward to continuing to connect, and to supporting funny folks and all those who want to laugh.

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Laughter animates and empowers us; through laughter we can shake up stale norms and break free from stereotypes. As a laughing audience, we affirm the comedian and we connect to one another. We release tension in our bodies and our psyches. We want to bring as much of this to Katarokwi/Kingston as we can! Let’s get hysterical!

THE HYSTERICS COLLECTIVE operates within a non-hierarchical and community-based framework that connects and supports funny folks and all those who wanna laugh. Interested in connecting? You can email us at thehystericscollective@gmail.com or find us online at www.facebook.com/thehystericscollective.