

## Episode 1.4 Hufflepuff Self Care with Kaarina Mikalson

August 3, 2017

Hannah (Host): [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Welcome back. I missed you. You know, every week I think to myself, what an incredibly stupid idea to claim that this podcast was going to be weekly and then every week, I have such a fun time making it, so thanks for listening. I sat on this evening to drink rosé and Skype with a dear friend, but before we get to that, let me tell you what my secret feminist agenda is this week. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

Hannah (Host): You know what is going to set you free, dear listener? Realizing how fun it is to do things by yourself. This is, mmm, I'm not great at this yet. Uh, when it comes to big events like concerts or parties, particularly anything that's going to involve needing to interact with people, it still scares me sometimes. Can you imagine how unbelievably liberating it would be to just feel like, "Yeah, I can go to a club by myself. Yeah, I can absolutely go out to that concert by myself. Oh, I really liked that comedian. I'll just buy myself a ticket to go see them." You could do absolutely anything you wanted all the time without having to worry about finding somebody to go with you. It's a radical, liberating possibility.

If you are interested in living the life of freedom and adventure that is doing things by yourself, I recommend starting small. The easiest point of entry to doing something by yourself is going to a movie. It's so low stress seeing a movie by yourself. You can see whatever it is you want. Uh, if like me, you were overwhelmed by the prospect of unlimited choice, you can ask Twitter to help you choose a movie, that is also acceptable. You can go whatever time you want. You can show up as early or late as you want. You can buy whatever snacks you want. You can sit wherever in the theater you want. You don't even need to worry about there being two good seats together. It really is liberating. Last night I took myself out to see a *Spider-man: Homecoming*. Not sure why it was called Homecoming. That didn't really seem to be a theme. Wait, I think they're at the homecoming dance at the end. Never mind, movies are hard. It was fine. It was fine. It was cute. I like Robert Downey Jr. a lot. I shouldn't. I feel ashamed of that. I usually don't feel ashamed of things I like. I do feel ashamed of liking Robert Downey Jr. but I like him anyway. Whatever. It was entertaining. At the end, I didn't have to have a conversation with anybody about how entertaining I'd found it. It was great. It was incredibly low pressure. I came back home after it was done.

Seeing a movie by yourself is a great gateway drug into taking yourself out for a nice meal. Maybe going out to a live show of some variety by yourself, or for me, what has always felt like sort of the pinnacle of doing things on your own which is traveling by yourself. I actually have a fair amount of experience traveling by myself. I did it when I was younger when I think we're all a little, maybe a little bit more courageous when we were younger and got used to it enough that now it doesn't seem like a big thing anymore. It seems perfectly natural and normal just to take

## Secret Feminist Agenda Transcript

myself to a city I don't know, and take myself out for long walks during the day. I actually really enjoy exploring places on my own terms and, and doing things at my own pace. If you hate doing things by yourself, that is absolutely fine. If the prospect of traveling by yourself sounds lonely and miserable, that is totally okay. It isn't necessarily for everyone, but if you have the luxury of trying to out, give it a try. Even if it's just a day, just see what it's like. Even if it's just not even a trip, but you know, just some activity. Just see what it's like to, you know, take yourself out for coffee and read your book in a coffee shop or to take yourself out for a walk. Some of us are really, really good at building in those times to spend with ourselves and some of us are really bad at it. I, for one, find I'm always happier when I'm building in those times for myself and I always feel freer to live the life that I want to live when I remind myself that I'm allowed to do whatever I want, whenever I want to do it [laughter] –how incredibly indulgent–when I remind myself that in fact I can always take myself out to something; I don't have to wait for somebody else to also be interested in doing it. So there you go. Whether it's a two week trip or a dumb superhero movie. That's my agenda this week. Spend a little more time with you. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

Hannah (Host): Alrighty. It's time to meet Kaarina Mikalson. Kaarina is a PhD candidate at Dalhousie University in Halifax where she studies contemporary Canadian literature with a focus on women's graphic narratives. That's graphic as in comics, though sometimes they're sexy too. She's also a talented digital scholar and textual editor and in her free time roller-derbys with the Anchor City Rollers (I think roller-derby is a verb, so that's a correct sentence) and makes beautiful feminist cross-stitches. She likes bats and sloths and has a very fluffy cat named Cobweb. [Music: "I Will" by Mitski]

Hannah (Host): Is that wine?

Kaarina (Guest): [laughter] Yeah, I got the littlest little glass of wine.

Hannah (Host): You're doing a great job.

Kaarina (Guest): Thank you.

Hannah (Host): Hi. I'm just checking that we're both recording and we are! Look at us. We're both doing a great job. Hey, through the, through the screen, through the screen, cheers. Don't actually hit your screen with your wineglass.

Kaarina (Guest): Cheers.

Hannah (Host): Cheers. Will you re-describe for the good listening audience, your outfit, your most-Kaarina of outfits?

Kaarina (Guest): So I'm wearing a plaid hoodie and it's dark green, which is my favorite colour. I'm wearing a t-shirt with a dinosaur on it and it says dino-mite and I'm wearing

## Secret Feminist Agenda Transcript

a roller skate patterned, or roller skate print, pajama shorts that I sewed myself.  
[laughter] I'm so delighted.

Hannah (Host): [laughter] I'd say the most Kaarina-thing about your outfit is how delighted you are with it.

Kaarina (Guest): [laughter] I think that this is what it is to be a Hufflepuff,

Hannah (Host): Delighted with your own outfits?

Kaarina (Guest): Uh, so when I think about Hufflepuff, I think about like loyalty, but above all, like loyalty to yourself and your own happiness.

Hannah (Host): This is. This is the greatest tweet that you have ever crafted. And that's saying something because you are a great crafter of tweets, but the greatest one you ever crafted was something along the lines of "It makes sense that Hufflepuffs—"

Kaarina (Guest): Yeah, are associated with food.

Hannah (Host): Yeah, that they live near the kitchen because they're associated with loyalty and the greatest loyalty that you can have to yourself as to feed yourself well.  
[laughter]

Kaarina (Guest): It's true. [laughter]

Hannah (Host): Okay. So let's, let's, I don't know if you had a plan about what you wanted to talk about—

Kaarina (Guest): I don't.

Hannah (Host): But you are like a sage of self-care. Like how, how did you get so good at the practice of self-care? Because you are like unusually good at it.

Kaarina (Guest): Oh, that's a good question. I'm not sure. I think part of it has to do with when I grew up, I thought I was an introvert and then at some point I realized I was just really lonely and hadn't made many, like, I hadn't found friends in my community that I wanted to hang out with. So I think that like I learned how to spend time alone in really fulfilling ways, which I think is like prime, like the foundation of self-care for me is like learning how to spend time alone in rewarding ways.

Hannah (Host): That's really good. That's really speaking to me right now. Because I'm like experiencing a lot of social anxiety that I feel like would be really resolved—Like, when I am feeling really good about my social community, I'm great at spending time by myself. Like when I feel very solid about like, "Oh, I have all of these friends I could be spending time with" and then I feel great about being, like "I'm not going to see any of them" but what I'm, but what I'm feeling lonely spending time alone feels lonely.

## Secret Feminist Agenda Transcript

Kaarina (Guest): Yeah. Yeah. Um, and another part of it I think, uh, my friend Kath once was talking to me about a stressful academic thing that I was dealing with and she told me that she knew I could handle it because I'm really good at working from a place of calm as opposed to working from a place of stress. So a lot of my self-care that comes with the privilege of being a grad student with like very, very little fixed schedule, is being able to like, okay, instead of writing this thing that I feel really anxious about while I feel really sad and hungry and sick, like let's address all of those things, like feed myself, obviously, you know, like address all of my other needs and then work. Get the work done when I feel more capable, you know?

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Kaarina (Guest): Yeah. So I guess it's just like a lot of like self-indulgence, but not even self-indulgence because like feeding yourself properly and making sure that you're wearing comfy clothes and like, yeah. I had a great conversation with my mom and she was still at work even though it was really late when I called her and then I said, "Okay, I'm going to hang up now, I really have to go to the bathroom." And she's like, "Oh me too, but I'll wait until I send out this thing." And I was like, "No, don't use your own body as reward system." Like you're not gonna—you're gonna finish it a lot more slowly if you're thinking about how much you have to pee. [laughter] Just like deal with your body and then deal with the thing. [laughter]

Hannah (Host): [laughter] But how often do we do that? Like, you can eat lunch once you're done this thing and it's like, well, but maybe I would do this thing more effectively if I just stopped now at ate lunch. Like, we treat our bodies like our enemies rather than like our friends.

Kaarina (Guest): Yeah. And what if that thing takes so much longer than you thought and then you like have hunger pains. I get hunger pains if I don't eat like when my body wants me to or you know, just you don't get to eat lunch with your friends because you were busy doing the thing. Yeah.

Hannah (Host): You should always eat lunch with your friends if it's an option. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I love that idea of, of doing things from a place of calm. Do you remember that quiz was making the rounds? Not really a quiz. It's like a checklist. It's like things to do with when you're not okay.

Kaarina (Guest): Yeah. And I remember seeing that and being surprised that it was like a... that it was something that people really needed to hear. Like it seemed obvious to me. [laughter]

Hannah (Host): That's amazing.

Kaarina (Guest): Then I was like, okay Kaarina, that's a shitty thing to verbalize but also like it really didn't make sense to me, but it is really, I find that really useful when I'm

## Secret Feminist Agenda Transcript

talking other people through things, especially when they're far away. To say like, "okay, so this is a really huge thing. We're not going to resolve it right now. Or maybe you just need to dwell on these feelings, but like, do you need a shower? Are you thirsty? Like are there things that you're putting off because you're getting wrapped up in something?" You know?

Hannah (Host): Yeah. We were talking before we started recording about the idea of Kaarina, like offering self-care consultation services for hire and I would say in the meantime, while she figures out how to make that business work, uh, I'm going to share with this quiz because it's almost like having a digital Kaarina just talking you through how to like, make sure you're okay.

Kaarina (Guest): Yeah. Although step one for Kaarina, which is not on that list, would be like put on a plaid flannel hoodie.

Hannah (Host): This is—my friend V has talked about having a time out hoodie, which is like when life is too much and you just need a time out, you can just like put—or, mm, no, it's a calm down hoodie.

Kaarina (Guest): Yeah, yeah. Sometimes I put like a ginger essential oil in my hood or another oil to like calm me down because it's right there.

Hannah (Host): Hoodies are great for this and they just, they're like a human equivalent of like a thunder jacket. Like those things you put on anxious dogs? And it's just like, wrap yourself up. It's good. You'll be fine. That's why it's hard to like be panicky or overwhelmed in the summer.

Kaarina (Guest): Yes. Because then you just get sweaty and it makes your little cave of cozy that much [inaudible].

Hannah (Host): So somebody on Twitter, I can't remember who it was, but it was like I've had a really hard day so when I get home I'm going to make myself a pillow fort and I had this moment where I was like, fuck, we're adults. We can just make pillow forts whenever we want. I haven't made a pillow fort in decades. What am I doing?

Kaarina (Guest): Yeah, this is how Ryan, my partner, deals with a lot of things, is to like make himself small, soft places. So when we lived in Edmonton we had this a great closet which he just lined with sleeping bags and pillows and blankets and we would watch movies in there. He would have naps in there and it was just the best. It was the best place. Yeah.

Hannah (Host): [laughter] That's so beautiful.

Kaarina (Guest): [laughter]

## Secret Feminist Agenda Transcript

- Hannah (Host): So what else is on? So we've got small soft places and hoodies and feeding yourself and going to the bathroom. What else is on your important self-care checklist?
- Kaarina (Guest): I drink a lot of water. Lately I've been having more coffee and alcohol than is good for me? Like I've been turning to those when actually what I need is like water.
- Hannah (Host): I will never forget this, this time that a colleague of mine... I'd like, I was just like in a very busy, stressful period of my life and I'd had like four coffees and I was like, "They're just not working. They are just making me more and more tired." And she was like, "How much water have you had today?" And I was like, "I've had no water, I don't have time for water, I only have time for coffee." And she was like, "Okay, your body's not processing the caffeine because it's dehydrated and it doesn't know how to use it. So like if you want that coffee to do anything, you also have to stay hydrated." And so like that has just become this thing in my brain that when I know I've had a couple of coffees and I feel like garbage, just a little voice in my brain is like, you know, the coffee won't work if you don't also drink water. And it's like just a little, just those little things that are like, "Hey, have a glass of water, you'll do better."
- Kaarina (Guest): Um, and I think another thing is to like, I guess, tell somebody about a little tiny success. So often if I'm feeling really shitty I'll like put on nice eyeliner and then Snapchat somebody it. Or like just text somebody that I put on my pants. And like, invariably they will be happy for you. [laughter] I have not yet received a negative response.
- Hannah (Host): [laughter] So that is so true too. Like validation. It's okay to want validation. It's okay to need validation from people.
- Kaarina (Guest): Yeah. Validation, even for tiny things because they make, they accumulate.
- Hannah (Host): There is this conversation that didn't make it in when I edited down my conversation with Lucia because Lucia and I talked for too long, but it was a shame because it was great conversation and it was about, uh, creating sort of like feminist self-care badges and you could just have like a sash full of badges that are just like "great at getting out of bed." "Got out of bed," "got out of bed every day this week."
- Kaarina (Guest): Maybe that can be the start of my business. I've been sewing, like, I've been stitching little badges and I have one that says cozy femme on my jacket because that's my gender presentation. Um, and I have one that says smug bitch, which I haven't found an opportunity to wear yet. I should have worn it to my comprehensive exams obviously. But missed opportunity.
- Hannah (Host): Yeah. I mean it's never too late to be a smug bitch. Yes. If you start up a beautiful feminist badge making service, I will buy 100 badges from you.

## Secret Feminist Agenda Transcript

Kaarina (Guest): [laughter]

Hannah (Host): So, can you, I'm having a lot of conversations lately with people about like self-care and why it is as a feminist self-care feels so radical sometimes. Like do you have, have you articulated this to yourself, about why it feels like a feminist act to treat yourself well?

Kaarina (Guest): Yeah, and one of the ways. One of the ways I was thinking about this is that there's a feminist speaker series at Dal and one of the speakers was a social worker, or a psychologist, who was talking about depression, narratives of depression among women. And one of the things that she talked about was like how depression is physical or chemical or whatever, but it is also social. So it's based on your situation and how that becomes a cycle, right? If you're a woman who's caring for other people and that care is really stressful, then you get depressed but you don't have time to address your depression. Or addressing your depression becomes a source of guilt because it takes away from the time you spend caring and there's like no way out of that, right? You can't be the ideal carer and also the ideal self-carer. [laughter] And that came up when I was in a therapy, when I've been in therapy a few times, and my therapist have often wanted to focus on my relationship. At first I was like, okay, okay. But lately I've been really resistant to that and my current therapist was really receptive to that where I was like, okay, no, we need to talk about like my relationship is hard work. There's things going on in it. Yeah, sometimes I need to talk about it, but we need to acknowledge that I have a lot going on outside of my relationship that makes me a real person and also if we keep coming back to my partner and how I am managing my relationship or how I'm managing his mental health and stuff like that, that just puts so much pressure on me. So much pressure. Right? And it reminds me constantly that my primary thing, like the primary role for me is his partner and that's not true and it doesn't help him and it doesn't help me because then I get really resentful, so it's been really helpful to be really assertive and say like, "No, we need to talk about how I'm taking care of myself right now" or "We need to talk about my relationships with my family and how those are something that's really concerning me." And like, yeah, I guess acknowledging that even though some things are more pressing than others, maybe my relationship is the most pressing thing in my life, it's not, it doesn't always need to be our priority. Does that make sense? I suddenly feel like I'm being interviewed for a role as a self-carer for myself. [laughter] Did I get the job?

Hannah (Host): [laughter] You got the job of taking care of yourself. Yeah. I mean you're stuck with it one way or the other. Um, it reminds me, I was actually thinking of this in relation to somebody else recently, but it reminds me of that whole, um, when you're on a flight and they're making the sort of security features announcement and they tell you that before you put the oxygen mask on, like, a child or somebody with you, you have to put it on yourself first. And it's like that basic premise that like, you will do nobody any good if you pass out from lack of oxygen. Like, you can only help people if you were helping yourself first and like,

## Secret Feminist Agenda Transcript

we've heard it a million times, but can you imagine how hard it would be in the moment? If you're on a flight that's going down and you're with a child or a loved one--

Kaarina (Guest): Who's freaking out maybe, or maybe not .

Hannah (Host): Who's freaking out. Yeah, but who needs you? Right? Who in that moment feels like they're less capable than you are for whatever reason, and how hard it would be to pause and put the oxygen mask on yourself first. And not just give in to that instinct of like, no, this person's wellbeing is more important than mine. And like how strongly that instinct is driving us sometimes and how much we sometimes need to like push back against it and be like, "No, I do nobody any good when I don't take care of myself. I'm not helping me and I'm also not helping the people who depend on me."

Kaarina (Guest): Yeah. I can't put a mask on anybody if I'm passed out. [laughter]

Hannah (Host): Yeah, exactly.

Kaarina (Guest): That makes me think of like another element of this that I've been working through. I feel like I, like many people like me, was socialized to be very nice to people around me regardless of how they treated me or like regardless of the power dynamics, like I was socialized to be really nice and that didn't really do me much good. Right? Because it just kind of, you know, people push, treat you like a pushover and when things were really difficult for me when I was living in Edmonton and I had a lot going on, especially in my relationship and my family life and stuff and I just felt like I was failing all the time at being nice to people and meeting their needs and keeping them happy, because it was impossible. Right? I can't, I can't fix somebody else's obsessive compulsive disorder, surprisingly. So every day I like, this is probably like the most like mindfulness thing I've ever done. Like every day I would just like walk around Edmonton and like in my head I'd be like, "be kind to yourself, be kind to yourself, be kind to yourself." And I would just like chanted in my head until it was the thing that was at the top of my mind like. And so it was like, "oh, what should I do right now? I should take care of myself." And, and it makes me think of when you were saying that, um, you just filled your Instagram with fat women and prioritized them as the thing that you wanted to look at until they were your standard of like, or maybe not your standard, but they are part of the thing that you want to get out everyday.

Hannah (Host): Right? Yeah, yeah. You can rewire your brain. You really can, like it just needs to be this deliberate--

Kaarina (Guest): It's so cool. [laughter]

Hannah (Host): Yeah, I had a real revisiting of that moment actually recently when I was in Edmonton and Marcelle has started to do this really beautiful thing where she shares with her friends, um, printed out photographs both of times that she

## Secret Feminist Agenda Transcript

spent with them and then just like a pile of beautiful photographs of her wonderful child that we all love so much. So, there is something in this age of digital photographs, there was something very touching about receiving hard copies of photographs. And um, she gave me this pile of photos when I arrived in Edmonton. Yeah. So one of the photos that he gave me was this photo of me and Claire playing with Elliot in the ocean when they were all in Vancouver at the same time. And it was like that. I remember that moment. It was such a wonderful like, you know, they sort of all overlapped in their visit for like six hours and we spent that time together on the beach and we had such a wonderful time and it felt so beautiful and I felt so much part of a community and I looked at that photo and all I could see was like, "Oh you look really disgusting in your bathing suit." And I was like, "Oh, I know how to deal with this. I know exactly what to do. I'm going to take this photo and I'm going to open up Instagram and I'm going to look at pictures of the women on Instagram who I love in their bathing suits and I'm going to keep doing that. And I'm going to look back and forth between this photo of me and this photo of these women until I can like reclaim this moment as something that like I know was really, really special" and it just gave me like, it just reminded me of how sometimes it feels like your brain's no good and it's only going to do bad things and it's like,

Kaarina (Guest): Oh yeah.

Hannah (Host): [laughter] Yeah, right? You know that feeling where you're like, it's got a bad brain, it's no good. But you can like, you can talk it out of its bad ideas sometimes. I feel like I had one other thing I wanted to—Oh yeah. I just wanted to come back to mantras. It sounds like you might be a believer in mantras. Are you believer in mantras?

Kaarina (Guest): I didn't know I was. That's the first time I've described it that way and I was like, Kaarina that's gross.

Hannah (Host): [laughter]

Kaarina (Guest): And now I feel bad for saying that's gross, but also like, I don't know, I'm suspicious of that kind of like, like Western women being like, "Ooh, Eastern stuff is so wonderful." [laughter]

Hannah (Host): Yeah, that's fair. The word mantras is like fraught with a lot of baggage. Is there a better thing we could call them?

Kaarina (Guest): Motto?

Hannah (Host): Oh I like mottos a lot.

Kaarina (Guest): Yeah, and if there's a word that is not mantra, like, yeah, affirmation?

Hannah (Host): I'm gonna go... affirmation also makes me want to gag a little bit. Um, I'm going to go cheer.

## Secret Feminist Agenda Transcript

Kaarina (Guest): Cheer?

Hannah (Host): Cheer.

Kaarina (Guest): "You can do that. Hey. Hey. Hey."

Hannah (Host): Yeah, exactly. Exactly. That's exactly how I want to picture it. It's like, "Hey, Kaarina, be kind." 10 little Buffys, these little Buffys just cheering for you.

Kaarina (Guest): And they're like, we have to learn in this cheer. It's so hard. And the cheer is like "Sun-ny-dale. Go Sunnydale!" [laughter]

Hannah (Host): [laughter] Okay. Give me some good thesaurus synonyms for affirmation.

Kaarina (Guest): Affirmation. Um, pledge.

Hannah (Host): [laughter]

Kaarina (Guest): Avowal. Guarantee. Oh, those aren't working for me. Let's try mantra. Slogan. By word. Watch word. Buzz word. Catch word. [laughter]

Hannah (Host): [laughter] Yeah. It's hard. It's hard. Okay. I'm going to say listeners, if you have any really good synonyms for mantra affirmation, etc, but aren't so like weird and corporate sounding/culturally appropriative, yeah, send them, send them to me. Let's see if we can come up with a new thing to, to call these, like this brain work that we all need to do sometimes.

Kaarina (Guest): We just need a word that exists outside of capitalism and colonialism. [laughter]

Hannah (Host): [laughter] [Music: "I Will" by Mitski]

Hannah (Host): If you'd like to read some of Kaarina's excellent tweets for yourself, you can follow her at @sobgoblin. Don't forget to check out the rest of the podcast episodes at [secretfeministagenda.com](http://secretfeministagenda.com), where I'm also posting short reading lists for every episode. This week includes that article on self-care strategies, which is a really great resource for everyone, as well as a few other things—some related to self-care, some almost entirely unrelated. The podcast is now up on Google Play for anyone who prefers to listen to it that way. Don't forget, wherever you listen to it to rate and review. If you like what you're hearing, it's the best way for other listeners to discover the podcast. If you want to tweet about the podcast, use the hashtag #secretfeministagenda. Uses up half your tweet like all good hashtags do. The podcast theme song is "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans off their album, *Chub Rub*. You can download the entire album on [freemusicarchive.org](http://freemusicarchive.org), or follow them on Facebook. Kaarina's theme song was "I Will" by Mitski. Well, that is it for this week. This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

