

Episode 4.3 ENTHUSED!!!

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Hannah McGregor: [00:10](#)

I'm Hannah McGregor and this is Secret Feminist Agenda and I gotta say, while two weeks between episodes feels like a long time, this slowed down pace is also opening up the time for me to do other things like get my traditional back-to-school head cold. Can you hear how congested I am? You're welcome. Thanks so much to everyone who's expressed support for the slowed down schedule this season, it really means a lot to me that you see me as a human being with needs rather than a podcast producing machine, which sometimes I feel like is a thing I have done to myself. You know why I keep doing it? Because I love it. Which brings me to my Secret Feminist Agenda for this week. I want to talk about being enthused. That is, about enthusiasm, about being stoked and pumped and super super into things.

I'm kind of cheating a little bit here. Is this cheating? Who knows. I'm trying to write an essay on this topic right now and I am struggling because I am still struggling internally with something that I understand to be true about myself, which is that I am an enthusiastic person. I've had a lot of listeners tell me that they find this podcast really positive and that it's that positivity that draws people to it, and that seems wild to me because I'm like, but aren't I mostly screaming about things that make me sad and or angry? But I guess I scream in an enthusiastic fashion. I open this essay on being enthused by talking about the fact that I often get feedback in my teaching evaluations that I am bubbly and fun and energetic and obviously extremely into my subject matter. And that feedback, well let's say it doesn't sit well with me, and there's a few reasons why it doesn't sit well with me. One of those reasons is undeniably the deeply gendered nature of that kind of feedback. There have been a ton of studies that have shown that gender has such an impact on student evaluations that, in fact, student evaluations reveal the students' perception of gender more accurately than they reveal anything about the teaching ability of the instructor, which is wild. And the gender difference, in terms of how students speak about their instructors, is massive. This applies to race as well. There's deeply ingrained biases about things like gender and race and sexuality and ability and body size and all of these things that come through massively in student evaluations, and any woman who has taught a class and got student evaluations will tell you that they've gotten things like comments on their appearance and their clothing and generally comments on how nice they are. And that's what I get a lot of in my evaluations, comments about, you know, how fun I am, comments about how bubbly I am. And there is a part of me that always winces when I get that.

It's not just because of that gendered bias though. It's also because of how I have been trained as a scholar to associate scholarly seriousness with, well, seriousness – that if you are a real

intellectual, you aren't fun, you aren't upbeat, you don't laugh, you don't smile, you are serious and frowning and probably wearing tweed. I've written about this before, specifically around the topic of fandom, that the kind of 'academic cool' that is often performed by scholars really falls apart for people who are scholars and fans at the same time or who bring their fandom into their scholarship. Because being a fan is about being enthusiastic about things. It's about liking things openly and unapologetically and liking things is at odds with the persona of the academic, at least the one that I was trained that I should be performing. I was taught by serious academics who embodied that seriousness and who modeled to me that you did not let your personal interests or your feelings sway your scholarship one way or the other. And gradually I have come to learn that that approach is at odds with my own understanding of feminism. That part of being a feminist scholar for me is bringing my affect, my feelings, my emotional responses into my work. Not to the point that they become other people's problems, but certainly in a way that models that feeling is always part of what I do. I'm thinking right now of, I've probably quoted this before, but my colleague Tanis McDonald's saying that crying is feminist pedagogy. That crying in front of your students can really be a teaching moment and then I want to hold that intention with white woman tears and their weaponization. That affect is context-specific and identity-specific, and that there are ways to bring it into your work that I think are productive and contribute to feminist pedagogy, and then there are also other ways to bring your tears into the office that are actually deeply derailing and passive aggressive.

But that's a topic for another day. I'm talking about enthusiasm. I take a great deal of joy in the work that I do. I take joy in teaching, I love being in the classroom, I love teaching my students, I love the conversations we get to have, I love working through ideas with new people. I take a great deal of joy in writing, not 100% of the time, sometimes writing is awful, but mostly I really like it. I take a great deal of joy in spending time with other people who are thinking seriously and intensely about topics that I also care about and the opportunities to just have long conversations. I take a great deal of joy in making this podcast and getting to have these conversations with folks all over the world. This all makes me really happy, and there is part of me that can't help but feel that that happiness undermines the seriousness of the work that I do, that if I'm really liking it, it can't be truly serious work. And I'm working on unlearning that, I'm working on trying to embrace my enthusiasm and my joy and my pleasure as a fundamental part of the work that I do as one of my teaching tools, as one of my scholarly tools as a possibly as a feminist tool; enthusiasm as a feminist tool. Remember part of being a killjoy is also embracing real joy. It's killing the joys of patriarchy so that you can find space for actual joy and I find a lot of space for actual joy in the work that I do a lot of the time and so as I've been working to unlearn my own sort of internalized judgment about my enthusiasm, I've

been trying to catch places where I performed disinterest or default to hating things because I've been socialized to do that because that's what I think is cool because everyone else around me is doing it.

One example that comes to mind is a little while ago when I was commenting to my friend and former guests of the podcast, Zena Sharman how terrible Twitter is, because that's how we talk about Twitter, right? It's terrible. It's a hellscape, it's an absolute nightmare, we all hate Twitter, we're just on their cause we hate ourselves. And Zena was like, nah, I'm a Gemini, I love communicating, I love staying in touch with people, I love knowing what other people think, Twitter is great I love Twitter. And I was like, Oh shit. I also love Twitter. I just think that I'm supposed to feel bad about the fact that I love Twitter because serious people either hate it or refuse to participate in it at all. So I've been walking around saying like, Oh, Twitter gah God damn, what a terrible place. It's like, no, if I actually hated it, I'd stop using it. I don't, I like it, it's fun. I mean sometimes it's bad, but sometimes everything is bad.

The other example that springs to mind is a catchphrase that my friend Holly Kate shared with me not too long ago that in fact she shares with a lot of people and that I know a lot of us have been trying to embrace, and the phrase is, if you can't get out of it, get into it. And gosh, I like this a lot. So it's the advice she gives when you are committed to doing something that you genuinely can't get out of, but you feel resentful about it. She's like, listen, if you actually are stuck doing this thing, if you genuinely can't get out of it. I mean sometimes we just need to try harder to get out of things we don't actually want to do, but if you really can't get out of it, what if you just got super into it? What have you just really embraced it? This isn't going to apply to everything, like some things suck and you have to do them anyway. But you know, sometimes you've got a really long day with a lot of meetings and a lot of shit that you don't want to do and it's like, what if I was just really super into meetings today? What if today I just loved everything I was doing? What if I just reframed this as something and I was feeling enthusiastic about, and you know what? For me, the more I embrace my innate inner enthusiasm, the more I like everything I do. Complaining about things makes them feel harder most of the time. Sometimes it's cathartic for sure, but mostly for me, just telling myself a story about how much I hate the things that I'm doing versus if I tell myself a story about how I'm like super into what I'm doing – it works on me.

I think a big part of my hesitation around this language of enthusiasm is the way that it resonates with both gender discourses of things like telling women to smile, the sort of management of our affect, the way that we are treated as public property and expected to perform our emotions in particular ways. As well as

this kind of neoliberal positivity discourse which blames people's illness and unhappiness on their attitude rather than naming the actual structural causes of problems. And I'm thinking in particular of things like the pink washing of breast cancer so that folks with breast cancer are told to like put on makeup because if you look good, you'll feel better, which a lot of the time feels like being told that you should not be publicly unhappy or publicly ill because it makes other people uncomfortable. And I don't want an embrace of enthusiasm to turn into another kind of policing of an effect. I don't want to contribute to a culture in which people are blamed for their problems because they didn't have a good enough attitude or people are punished for failing to perform their emotions and the ways that other people want them to. I mean, I have been told by male colleagues that I should stop being so angry about things and that I would get a lot more done if I was more positive. And that kind of thing makes me want to never smile again in my goddamn life. But as I feel out the difference between a genuine enthusiasm that comes from within me and a kind of gendered expectation of what I will be like in the world, I'm realizing for myself that my resentment of the gendered language of bubblyness actually turns into a barrier to experiencing my own pleasure. That because my happiness and friendliness and pleasantness as a thing that is expected, I lean away from it, I wince away from it even when it's genuine. And I think a really beautiful side effect of feminism's resistance to these gendered expectations about how we perform will not only be liberating us from the expectation of smiling and being nice all the time, but will also be the freedom to lean into our real pleasures and our real joys and our real enthusiasms, to feel enthusiastic because we really feel it, not because it's expected of us. And to lean into the pleasure and fun of things because we want to, not because we're going to be punished otherwise.

Fun side note, because I still have a head cold, throughout this thinking out loud about enthusiasm, I have been getting an increasingly bad headache and it's been harder and harder to feel enthusiastic about this topic as I feel worse and worse. So there you go. Real talk enthusiasm. It's complicated.

Okay. Are you ready for the unveiling of our new segment? Thanks to everyone with thoughts and feedback about what you might like to see in this spot. Formerly Self Care Corner, I have decided that the new mini-sode segment is going to be the Killjoy Survival Kit. Now in case you missed the whole episode I made on Killjoy Survival Kits – that's season three episode 27 – this comes from a section in Sara Ahmed's book, *Living A Feminist Life*. It's conclusion one, A Killjoy Survival Kit, and in this section she talks about how hard it is being a killjoy sometimes that it makes your life feel hard and exhausting. She writes, quote "survival can also be about keeping one's hopes alive, holding onto the projects that are projects in so far as they have yet to be realized. You might have to become willful to hold on when you were asked to let go, to let it

go. Survival can thus be what we do for others with others. We need each other to survive. We need to be part of each other's survival" end quote. Ahmed goes on to talk about what's in her survival kit, what helps her survive being a feminist killjoy, what helps her keep going. And that includes books and things and tools and time and life and other killjoys and then she itemizes some of those specific things. What books for her are in her survival kit, what tools. And what I would really like to do in the segment is hear from you about what's in your Killjoys Survival Kit. So what I want you to do is submit survival kit items. Tell me what's in your kit. You can tweet at me or you can comment on the website, secretfeministagenda.com or you can email me at secretfeministagenda@gmail.com. I would also be happy to edit in recordings of you telling me what your survival kit items are. So, you can record yourself on your phone and email me that voice file and I will, I mean, I will listen to it first and if I want to I will edit it into the episode. So please send me your killjoy survival kit items. I can't wait to hear from you about what's going in your survival kit. And I will tell you right now that the top item in my survival kit this week is sleep. Sleep is helping me to survive.

As always, you can find show notes and the rest of the episodes of Secret Feminist Agenda on secretfeministagenda.com you can follow me on Twitter at [@HKPMcGregor](https://twitter.com/HKPMcGregor), and you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag [#secretfeministagenda](https://twitter.com/hashtag/secretfeministagenda). I don't forget to rate and review the show on Apple Podcasts. It's the best way to help other people find it. We have three new reviews this week from [audioemily](#), [SarahMidwest](#), and [lsavvedw](#) I don't know if I said that last one right, but I feel pretty confident about the first two. Thank you all so much.

The podcast theme song is Mesh Shirt by Mom Jeans off their album, Chub Rub. You can download the entire album on freemusicarchive.org or follow them on Facebook.

Secret Feminist Agenda is recorded on the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations where I'm grateful to live and work.

This has been Secret Feminist Agenda. Pass it on