

# Episode 4.9 Abundance

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Hannah McGregor: [00:10](#)

I'm Hannah McGregor and this is Secret Feminist Agenda. And guess what? I'm keeping this one real tight because recording and editing this podcast episode is all that is standing between me and a festive holiday party that I really want to go to. So in that spirit, let's just get straight into our topic for this episode today. I want to talk about taking stock.

I don't know if you saw that viral tweet slash meme that was going around on Twitter a little while ago that was like everybody, it's the last month or the last two months of the decade quick, what have you accomplished? And everybody was using it as an opportunity to list their major accomplishments of the decade. And then lots of other people were like, Oh, maybe we aren't just human CVs and can think about our value as people in different ways. And there was lots of really valid critique of the way that that kind of self promotion really reduces the complexity of our messy, beautiful, terrible, busy, exhausting, boring human lives too, like I said, a set of accomplishments. You know, we boil down all of the messy, complex business of living our lives into bullet points. A handful of things that we'll use to define ourselves and our value as people.

There's something similar that happens in all of these year-end decade-end top hits of the whatever listicles and reviews and summaries and memes and you know, I'm thinking of that Instagram thing that's like your top nine of the year, which is just a tool that scrapes your nine most liked pictures of the year and turns them into a grid and then you can point to them and be like, Oh, here's my year in a nutshell. And then I'm also thinking about all of these year-end and also currently decade-end lists that are coming out right now that are like, here are the most important books and here are the most significant films and here are all the things that you need to remember. And I get it, I get that desire to make lists and to evaluate things and to, you know, wade through the enormity and complexity of stuff and narrow down to a small number of things that we can point at. I think it makes a lot of sense as an urge. I think there's a lot of pleasure in it as an activity and I also think that it's really dangerous for all kinds of reasons and primarily because there is this kind of capitalist drive behind it, right? This logic of scarcity and this logic of competition that ends up coming to the surface.

There's this Clay Shirky line that he uses to describe the problem of the internet. He says 'abundance breaks more things than scarcity does' and it's kind of a truism, particularly of sort of publishing, that having too much of everything really breaks all of the systems that we have for making money off art and creative work. But what abundance breaks obviously is the industrial model that we're

working from the existing models that we have to sell things. Literary canons are a way of dealing with abundance. It's a way of pointing at the overwhelming surplus of books that exist in the world and saying, don't worry about it, you only have to read these many. Celebrity is a way of dealing with abundance, a way of pointing out all of the many people in the world and saying, don't worry, you only have to worry about these ones. These listicles are a way of dealing with abundance, they say, yeah, a million books were published in the past decade, but here are the 20 that are actually significant. And again, abundance is only a problem from the perspective of trying to sell things. And I've always been a little bit suspicious of this 'abundance breaks more things than scarcity does' line particularly because one of the examples that's most frequently used to support it is the quote unquote obesity epidemic. Basically people saying like, look, you can tell abundance is breaking things because we have an abundance of food and look how fat people are. So I'm naturally gonna become suspicious of any kind of logic that for one thing applies the same system to people's bodies as it does to industries, but also to any logic that's like, well the abundance of your body is a problem.

I mean, what if abundance is fine? What if abundance is great? What if the sheer amount of interesting stuff out there in the world is awesome and we just need to find new models to support abundance rather than relying on scarcity? I mean, what if when it comes to our own lives and these kinds of taking stock end-of-the-year, end-of-the-decade urges, I wonder if there's a similar logic that we can bring to bear. I wonder if we can look at the abundance and complexity and messiness of our lives and instead of trying to narrow those down to a short list of accomplishments, find other ways to take joy and pleasure in their messiness. I was skimming through Instagram photos recently, my own Instagram photos, obviously, don't we all spend time just looking at our own Instagram feeds? And thinking about, you know, if I was going to pull out a number of pictures that stood for the most significant moments in this year, which ones would I choose? And I noticed both how many of the photos that I really loved didn't stand in for a particular moment for a particular accomplishment or event that was iconic or could be looked back at just like my eye makeup looked cute that day, or look, I'm having fun with a friend in this picture. But also that when I did start to push myself to choose, I went to professional accomplishments. Oh, this talk that I gave. Oh, this event that I attended. Oh, this cool person that I met or this interview that I did. And that's great. I'm very proud of my professional accomplishments, my career is a big part of my life, undeniably. But when I try to boil down my own life into highlights, the tendency is to boil it down into career highlights because the rest of my life doesn't highlight well. I don't date, I'm not getting married, I don't have kids, I am not living a life that lends itself to those kinds of top 10 accomplishment lists.

So when I do try to make those lists, when I do try to do that kind of taking stock, I end up really ignoring a lot of the mundane pleasures and joys of my own life. The quiet time I spend with the animals I share my home with, going for ice cream with a dear friend and taking fun selfies next to a floral bush, long text conversations about dresses that I may or may not buy. I mean just these really day to day joys and pleasures that actually make my life the life that it is but don't lend themselves well to exciting social media brag-worthy events. It's also worth pointing out that a lot of the really key formative events of the past year in the past decade of my life have sucked, but that they are also a really important part of me and who I am and I don't want to leave them out either. With the end of the year ahead and the end of the decade ahead, there's going to be a lot of this kind of thinking surrounding us, this kind of take stock of things, count up lists of things, point at all of your accomplishments, figure out what you're doing with yourself.

And at the same time for those of us who create things, there's going to be all of these top 10 lists and most important lists and books and movies and podcasts that changed the world lists, and a lot of us are not going to be on any of them and all of these things, all of these tendencies towards listing and counting, like I said, it can be fun and it can also be really demoralizing. So for me, I'm going to try really hard to use the quietness of the holiday season and the opportunity for contemplation for taking stock that comes with these kinds of calendar shifts with the turning over of the new year, I'm going to try to use this as an opportunity to take stock in a different way, to slow down to think a little bit about where I am, to both contemplate and indulge in those pleasures that aren't about accomplishment but that are sometimes about quietness and peacefulness and I'm going to be working to resist that desire to boil my life down into a series of social media-worthy points. As tempting as it may be to just make a top 10 list, that's 10 pictures of me standing next to Lindy West and say, there we go, we did it scraped in at the last moment of the decade. And I'd love to hear from some of you what are the banal, mundane, un-noteworthy things that you're really valuing about your life right now or your past year or your past decade that maybe aren't making it onto these top lists but that you know are important to you? I want to hear about them because I want us all to value them more.

Alright, let's take a peek into our Killjoy Survival Kits. I've got a lovely email last month from Elizabeth who says, 'as for my feminist survival kit contribution, the things that have been helping me most these last few months slash forever are queer art of all forms, but preferably of the joyous variety and good science fiction in all mediums. When life feels nothing but exhausting and draining and slog-like I find visiting worlds of present queer joy and resilience or imagined worlds of greater or just different future dynamics of justice and peace is a balm.' Thank you so much Elizabeth. I love that sentiment. I love visiting especially super

queer alternative worlds. This is why my top album of the year was the Steven Universe movie soundtrack. Steven Universe should definitely be in my Feminist Killjoy Survival Kit, but you know what I'm actually officially putting in there this week? I'm putting drugs, I mean modern pharmaceuticals. I had a bad flare up this week of the neck pain that was making life very difficult for me back in March. And the gratitude I felt to have access to pharmaceuticals. I mean the fact that prescribed drugs are, while not free, extremely affordable for the most part in Canada, fills me with deep and profound gratitude. I wish for everybody in the world access to the medicines that they need. I wish for free PharmaCare for everybody. I wish for the end of stigma around mental health medication. I wish for adequate pain management for who have historically been denied adequate pain management drugs, particularly black and indigenous people. I wish for all of us to have access to all the forms of care that we need and deserve. And for me this week, it was just the fact that I could take a fucking anti-inflammatory, my God.

As always. You can find show notes and the rest of the episodes of Secret Feminist Agenda on [secretfeministagenda.com](http://secretfeministagenda.com). You can follow me on Twitter @HKPMcGregor and you can tweet about the podcasts using the #secretfeministagenda. Of course, you can rate and review the show and I hope that you will. There are two beautiful new reviews this week. One from easternhemlocktea in the United States and the other from Dan Bonzer in Great Britain. Thank you both so much for your kind and generous words.

The podcast theme song is Mesh Shirt by Mom Jeans off their album, Chub Rub. You can download the entire album on free music, [archive.org](http://archive.org) or follow them on Facebook.

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

This has been Secret Feminist Agenda. Pass it on.