

## Episode 4.15 #WorldObesityDay

March 6, 2020

Hannah McGregor: [00:00](#) [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. And you know what? I had a really hard time coming up with the topic this week because literally all I can think about is the potential coming pandemic, which I am finding so wildly triggering of my anxiety that I can hardly handle it.

Hannah McGregor: [00:31](#) I actually feel like prior to this year, I had my anxiety like, pretty under control? Like, news was stressing me out and stuff, but it wasn't a problem in the same way it used to be. And in the past couple of months, a combination of the RCMP occupation of Wet'suwet'en land and now the coronavirus spread, I am, I am back to low-key, at-work panic attacks. So I guess if you're in the same boat, don't beat yourselves up. But I'm trying to take my own advice, which is take a little bit of a step back from social media, resist the urge to read a thousand things, focus on getting information from reputable public health updates, listening to the voices of authorities who I trust, and otherwise taking things one day at a time rather than freaking out about what might be coming up. And, and that's helping me. And I hope you're finding things that are, that are helping you as well. And if you haven't, maybe one of those will. Seriously, Twitter is not a good place to be when you are feeling panicky, I gotta say. But I figured because I am feeling a little overwhelmed, a little geared up, that I would focus on something that made me happy. So I asked on Twitter, which one of those things that make me happy I should talk about and by a very slim margin, the winner was this week's episode. So let's go. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

Hannah McGregor: [02:06](#) Today I want to talk about World Obesity Day. Okay, that might seem counterintuitive as a thing that would make me happy, but stick with me here. It turns out that March 4th was declared by the World Health Organization to be World Obesity Day, #worldobesityday, and they sure as hell didn't mean it in a celebratory way. They meant it in an obesity-as-a-disease-and-let's-talk-about-curing-it way. But, fairly quickly, the community of fat Instagrammers got all over this and, and from what I can tell, it started with Sofie Hagen, who is amazing if you don't already follow them. Anyway, yesterday they posted a picture along with the following caption. They wrote: "Happy World Obesity Day. We are changing the narrative. Listen up! Today is World Obesity Day which is a fatphobic day where the focus is

on how to 'cure'"—scare quotes—"the 'disease'"—scare quotes—"that is fatness. Fatness is not an illness and it does not need a cure. So, here is my suggestion. We take over World Obesity Day and instead of demonizing and patronizing fat people, we instead celebrate them. We celebrate fatness. Yay! If you think about it, World Obesity Day can be just like Pancake Day where we love and celebrate our own fatness and that of others. I'm going to do a bunch of Instagram stories where I celebrate my favourite fatties and my own fatness. I hope you'll do the same. Happy World Obesity Day." And what proceeded from there was a ton of amazing fat people using that hashtag to post images and words that celebrated their own fatness and the fatness of others. It was a glorious reclamation of a day that, that originally had the function of only increasing the stigma against fat people.

Hannah McGregor: [03:59](#)

And here is the thing about conversations about obesity. The top thing they do is increase the stigma against fat people. There's an article that's been going around, you might've seen it already. If you haven't, it's linked in the show notes, *obviously*. It's called "Everything You Know About Obesity Is Wrong" and it's an excellent read. I really do recommend it. And what it points out is two really key things about the science behind fatness. One, studies all show that diets do not work, and two, they show that fatness is not necessarily an indicator of health. So, that suggests that people should make healthy choices and that we should just stop talking about fatness because it's not changeable and there's nothing wrong with it. So let's just talk about health from a much more holistic perspective and hey, when we're talking about health and public health, why don't we talk about, you know, access to affordable, nutritious food for everyone and a reduction in stress via more affordable healthcare and subsidized childcare and getting rid of the wage gap and eliminating systemic racism and things that we know for sure like seriously, negatively impact people's health and life outcomes.

Hannah McGregor: [05:24](#)

The article says, "The terrible irony is that for 60 years, we've approached the obesity epidemic like a fad dieter: If we just try *the exact same thing* one more time, we'll get a different result." Because at its heart, the way that we talk about obesity is about individualized shaming. It's not research-based, it's not based in science. It's based in a deep, widespread fatphobia that is particularly prevalent in the medical industry and that wants to vilify individuals and constantly make fatness a result of individual choice and individual weakness. Even though, again, there's really nothing that supports the idea of fatness as controllable. And yet somehow despite the fact that this

research has been around for decades and that all of these studies seem to confirm that the best thing that we can do to help with the correlation between fatness and negative health is in fact to reduce the stigma against fat people.

Hannah McGregor: [06:30](#)

Despite all of that, these ideas just don't seem to catch on. It's incredible to me outside of the sort of queer, feminist, radical communities that I spend most of my time, any other spaces that I move through, the amount of casual fatphobia in them is just *wild*. And it doesn't seem to be changing. The number of people I know who are constantly on diets, the number of spaces that I have to navigate where I see people getting publicly applauded for weight loss and other people suggesting that we should all start weight loss programs. The fact that, in my own family, I have had to ask time and time again for family members to stop equating weight loss with health. It's just a wildly hard set of biases, it seems, to work through. I mean, fuck, aren't they all? [Sad Laugh] Like that's, that... I guess that, I guess that is true of most forms of oppression of populations.

Hannah McGregor: [07:36](#)

But here's something that the article points out that's really stuck with me. It says, "Perhaps the most unique aspect of weight stigma is how it isolates its victims from one another. For most minority groups, discrimination contributes to a sense of belongingness, a community in opposition to a majority. Gay people like other gay people; Mormons root for other Mormons. Surveys of higher-weight people, however, reveal that they hold many of the same biases as the people discriminating against them." That is, that for a lot of people, the idea of fat people hanging out together, teaming up together, supporting and loving and being in community with each other is still like a really new idea. Fat activism has a long history and yet somehow an anthology being published in 2020 of people talking about their experiences of fatness is being promoted as though it's the first collection of writing about being fat. And maybe that's because, for a lot of fat people, they're coming newly to the idea of fat solidarity, of fat celebration, of fat community. And I guess if you're fat, and you've spent your entire life only hanging out with and talking to thin people, then it is a personal revelation the day that you suddenly realize [Laughs] that like maybe your body is okay the way it is and is not a disgusting thing that needs to be transformed.

Hannah McGregor: [09:04](#)

Which is why, I've gotta say, I fucking love having fat friends and I recommend it to everyone. If you are a fat person whose friends are exclusively thin, go find some fat friends and then talk to them about fatness. I may have mentioned this before,

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but I am in a fat kids book club that is a fucking revelatory experience where we read only books by fat people and centre all of our conversations around a shared understanding of the celebration of fat joy and fat brilliance. And it has shifted my understanding of myself and the possibility of community and my place in the world so entirely.

Hannah McGregor: [09:51](#)

It is wildly wearing to be in community all day with people who you care about, who you know cannot imagine looking like you do, who would hate themselves if they look like you do. It is hard to feel held and loved by and safe with those people. Now, that... You know, #notallthinpeople, I have some thin friends who I believe with all of my heart do not hate fatness and who prove that to me. But I genuinely believe that they are in the minority. I genuinely believe most of the thin people in my life cannot imagine having my body, cannot imagine being me, cannot actually wrap their heads around the idea that thinness is not more valuable than fatness, not as it applies to me, but as it applies to themselves. And sure, there is value in educating people about our experiences and I'm not saying [Laughs] I'm not saying you should cut thin people out of your life by any means. But I'm saying that fat community is radical and joyful and incredible and that the celebration on Instagram of World Obesity Day was an incredible example of what that kind of solidarity and joyful community-making kind of look like. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

Hannah McGregor: [11:15](#)

Alright, on the subject of joyful community-making, let's take a peek inside our Killjoy Survival Kits. [Sound Effect: Chest Creaking Open]

Hannah McGregor: [11:27](#)

I've actually got a whole bunch of contributions this week; we have an excitingly full kit this week. The first one is from Alex Ketchum who wrote to me on the topic of McGill University announcing its plan to end the graduate option in gender and women's studies. "PS Hannah, I have an idea for the feminist survival toolkit for *Secret Feminist Agenda*, for me as a faculty member and former graduate student is/was having a community of feminist researchers across the disciplines in which I could build a research community. With McGill University trying to end the graduate option in gender and women's studies, I want to underline that the community created by the graduate option is not tangential. By creating a research environment in which graduate students feel supported, they are able to do better research and be better scholars and honestly just thrive as humans." Solidarity to everybody at McGill who is trying to stop the cancellation of this program.

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- Hannah McGregor: [12:24](#) I also have a message here from Emily who is sharing two things in their survival kit. They write, "The first one is a book. *The Argonauts* by Maggie Nelson is always the book I need to pick up. I read it when I was living with a bunch of racist, homophobic conservatives and I read it when my grandmother was dying and I'm reading it while I'm so overwhelmed with work that I don't have time to breathe. It always speaks to the situation I'm in. The other thing is journaling. It's so useful to me to lay things out on a page where I can look at them at a little bit more of a distance and keep them to remember for next time. It helps me to find patterns and to remember why I loved books I was reading and the day the cat did that absurd thing. Once I write for awhile, even if I was an emotional mess to begin with, I get to the point where I remember the good things that have happened, too." Gosh, thank you for that, Emily. That almost made me feel like maybe I should try journaling. [Laughs] That sounds like it might be a really useful coping strategy.
- Hannah McGregor: [13:21](#) I also have an email here from Jess who is also at McGill and is also doing work to try to stop the suspension of the graduate option in gender and women's studies. Jess put the open letter opposing the suspension of the graduate option into their survival kit as well as Alison Piepmeier's book *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism*, which I actually haven't read somehow? So, I'm gonna grab that one, too. By the way, folks, I'm going to put a link to the open letter about the McGill graduate option in gender and women's studies into the show notes, so if you would like to also sign it, you can find it there.
- Hannah McGregor: [14:01](#) Finally, a quick note from my friend Amy who wrote to me, "Quick sanity check-ins—is this real?—are essential to my killjoy survival toolkit." Which reminded me of how much working against the gaslighting is at the heart of this whole project. As for me, I'm going to sneak in the other topic that I was considering for today's episode, which is the fact that I am like five-sixths of the way through watching the animated series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* which I recognize is very old, but I am just coming to for the first time right now. And it is an absolutely glorious and joyful show that is giving me many of the same feelings as *Steven Universe* in the sense that it feels both radical and heart-warming at the same time. And if you are looking for something that is going to make you feel better and you have not watched the series or you haven't rewatched it in a while, go check it out. Anticipate a proper episode coming when I have successfully completed the whole series.

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Hannah McGregor: [15:05](#)

If you want to tell me what's in your Killjoy Survival Kit, don't forget, you can email me at [secretfeministagenda@gmail.com](mailto:secretfeministagenda@gmail.com). [Sound Effect: Chest Slamming Shut] 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](https://twitter.com/hkpmcgregor) and you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag [#secretfeministagenda](https://twitter.com/hashtag/secretfeministagenda). Oh, I'm also on Instagram [@hkpmcgregor](https://www.instagram.com/hkpmcgregor) and this month I'm doing something that I think my friend Cynara started called March of the Selfies. So, if you'd like to see a lot of pictures of my face, you can find me there. Don't forget to rate and review this show. We don't have any new reviews today. That's okay, we had so many Killjoy Survival Kit contributions; it all balances out. But still! Go review the show if for no other reason than because it will lead to me saying your name here. The podcast's 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. And *Secret Feminist Agenda* is recorded on the traditional and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations where I'm grateful to live and work. Please go donate some money to the Wet'suwet'en legal defence fund right now. This is an ongoing legal battle and they still need support and help and solidarity. This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]