

[Episode 4.17 It's Okay Not to Be Okay](#)

April 3, 2020

Hannah McGregor: [00:00](#) [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. And here we are. Deep into a truly unprecedented moment in global history, weeks into a period of physical distancing or shelter-in-place or full-on quarantine. Not sure when we'll emerge or what the next weeks and months hold for us. Hey, this is a really hard fucking time, folks. And so, today I'm going to talk a little bit about what I've been focusing on. One might call it my [Laughs] *Secret Feminist Agenda*. You know the drill. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

Hannah McGregor: [00:54](#) So a lot of what I want to talk about today repeats key themes that have come up again and again in this podcast: making yourself cozy—I mean, specifically making baby cozy—, slowing down, asking for help. These are all recurring features of *Secret Feminist Agenda*. And the reason why I keep coming back to these things... I mean, there's a few reasons. One is that workaholicism is a particular interest of mine, but another is that key Sara Ahmed point that feminists need other feminists to survive, and I really want as many of us as possible to survive. And that involves a lot more than those really urgent, necessary public health protocols like washing your hands and standing six feet away from everybody like a heroine in a Jane Austin film. This is why we have Killjoy Survival Kits because we need to figure out ways to help each other survive and we're in the midst of this moment of being called on to do all kinds of unprecedented things to help each other survive. But I want to tell you about a moment I had about a week and a half ago when darling friend and two-time *Secret Feminist Agenda* alum Erin Wunker sent me a link to an interview with grief expert David Kessler.

Hannah McGregor: [02:15](#) The interview is called "That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief." And when I read it, I felt something crack open inside of me because here's the thing, I feel completely unequipped for what's happening in the world right now, but grief is something I know. Grief is a set of experiences and feelings that I can wrap my head around and that I can let sit inside of me without immediately panicking. I have experience in grief. In particular, the interview reframes anxiety as anticipatory grief and reminds us that so many of the things we're feeling right now, anger and sadness and bargaining, those are all parts of grief, too. Now, I don't, I don't want to claim that all of you are experiencing grief

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right now because I don't think that's necessarily some catch-all framework. What I'm trying to articulate is how liberating it was for me in that moment to realize that I wasn't okay and that it was okay to not be okay.

Hannah McGregor: [03:26](#)

There are all of these wild pressures coming at us from all directions to somehow turn this moment into one of productivity. You know, clean your house, learn a hobby, get super ripped, write a fucking book. And maybe for some people listening right now, those are your coping mechanisms. I know a lot of people [Laughs] are getting really into making bread and actually former guest Emily Hoven has been writing this beautiful thread on Twitter where she guides people through the slow and meditative process of making sourdough. And that's fine. That's great. If you are knitting a hundred sweaters a day, you do you. And of course we also can't forget that what's possible for each of us right now is also wildly different. Some people can't slow down because they're suddenly homeschooling their kids while expected to work remotely or because they work frontline jobs and medical fields or at grocery stores. Our lives look really different and our reactions to these suddenly transformed lives also look really different. But that dominant neoliberal discourse telling us to somehow turn this moment into an opportunity for self-perfection? That's a trap.

Hannah McGregor: [04:33](#)

I recently posted on Twitter about the academic fetishization of productivity—which is, as we've established, kind of a personal favourite topic—and how academia has taught a lot of us that our only real source of meaning, and thus our only real recourse in times of stress, is more work. And former guest Adèle Barclay responded with a point that's really been sitting with me. She wrote that many of us with developmental trauma learned to cope by dissociating via intellectual work, which lets us detach from our bodies and that the more she's been feeling her body, the more she's learning how tired she is or how she actually feels. And it's so tempting right now to not actually feel, because the way we're feeling sucks. It's so tempting to not sit with how this moment is impacting us physically and emotionally. And I think for a lot of us, diving into hyperproductivity right now is a way of dissociating, of not feeling our bodies and learning from them.

Hannah McGregor: [05:35](#)

And of course, as Kai Cheng Thom pointed out in the last episode, it feels really hard in the midst of a pandemic to trust our bodies. But I keep coming back to this passage from the David Kessler interview. He says, "There is something powerful about naming this as grief. It helps us feel what's inside of us. So

many have told me in the past week, 'I'm telling my coworkers I'm having a hard time,' or 'I cried last night.' When you name it, you feel it and it moves through you. Emotions need motion. It's important we acknowledge what we go through. One unfortunate byproduct of the self-help movement is we're the first generation to have feelings about our feelings." —I don't know if that actually stands up historically—"We tell ourselves things like, *I feel sad, but I shouldn't feel that*; other people have it worse. We can—we should—stop at the first feeling. *I feel sad. Let me go for five minutes to feel sad.* Your work is to feel your sadness and fear and anger whether or not someone else is feeling something." I want to add to that, that a sort of social justice, feminist framing of feeling does remind us that we can feel sad and at the same time we can recognize the way in which this moment is impacting people in incredibly different ways and the way this moment is massively heightening precarity and vulnerability. But that doesn't mean we don't have feelings. It means that those of us who still have secure incomes should be giving as much as we possibly can. But I just keep coming back to this idea that your work right now is to feel what you feel. This is like Feelings Having 101, like, "Feelings: have them." But [Laughs] guess what? This is a time for us to return to those really basic forms of wisdom. Which is why, this week, I'm focusing on reminding myself of something I already knew, but have to keep relearning all the time and I'm, I'm definitely having to relearn right now. It's okay to not be okay. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

Hannah McGregor: [07:38](#)

Alright. Speaking of survival, let's take a look into our Killjoy Survival Kits. [Sound Effect: Chest Creaking Open].

Hannah McGregor: [07:47](#)

I'm really eager to hear from you about what's helping you right now. I think it's really different person to person. For me, some of them are new, regularly scheduled hangouts with friends. Google Hangout Happy Hour on Tuesdays, regular Dungeons & Dragons game on Sundays, [Laughs] new FaceTime ukulele lessons with my dad on Fridays. The cats are massively helping, especially because I live alone and the new physical distancing protocols mean I haven't touched a person in 20 days and won't touch a person for the foreseeable future and it's so, so helpful for me to have other living creatures that I share my space with and that I can touch. I've been trying to get outside as much as possible, especially when the sun is out: moving my body in low impact and low pressure ways, just going for walks, doing some stretching.

Hannah McGregor: [08:46](#)

I've also been taking a huge amount of joy in the kinds of things that my friends are sharing on social media. Cynara's posting

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herself singing songs in her Instagram stories with these truly wild levels of production values; Baharak is posting pictures of writers at home on Twitter; and of course, like so much of the world, I am taking a huge amount of recourse in *Animal Crossing*, particularly now that my friends and I have figured out that we can visit each other's islands and give each other gifts. The day this episode comes out is also the birthday of *Secret Feminist Agenda* guest and friend of the podcast Brenna Clarke Gray and because we can't be with her in person, Lucia and I are throwing her an *Animal Crossing* birthday party. We've been gathering her presents throughout the week. And honestly, just focusing on collecting eggs in service of some sort of monstrous rabbit mascot is a welcome distraction.

Hannah McGregor: [09:51](#)

So let me know what's in your Killjoy Survival Kit right now. You can email me at secretfeministagenda@gmail.com or tweet at me to share. [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. You can follow me on Twitter or on Instagram [@hkpmcgregor](#). And you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag [#secretfeministagenda](#). Of course, rating and reviewing the show is always a helpful way to help other people find it. Thanks so much to Bren Jai in the US and [katieclarkest](#) and [a1b2c3g4h5](#) in Canada. The podcast theme song is "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans off their album *Chub Rub* and you can download the entire album on freemusicarchive.org or follow them on Facebook. *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 and shelter. This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]