

Episode 4.27 Asking For Help (Again)

October 23, 2020

Hannah McGregor: [00:00](#) [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. And I am currently making a grilled cheese sandwich in the same cast iron pan that I made an Apple crumble in two days ago and it's filling my apartment with this really confusing odor of vegan cheese, apples, and cinnamon. So that's where I'm at. How are you? Have you had enough water today? Have you stood up or stretched your back out recently? Could you close your eyes for a minute and give yourself a mini break? Not if you're driving, that would be very dangerous. Or could you maybe even go into your bedroom and take a little nap? Have you maybe even asked for help lately? [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

Hannah McGregor: [01:00](#) That's what I want to talk about today. I want to talk about asking for help. I actually talked about this for the first time in episode 1.7, which was made, I don't know, a century ago. And at the time I described it as something I wasn't very good at, but wanted to get better at. And I think it's something I have gotten better at in the intervening years. A really interesting side effect of *Secret Feminist Agenda* as a project for me is that it's helped me to stay accountable to my values because I say them out loud [Laughs] and not only say them out loud, but like record them and put them on the internet and then transcribe them and put them in a place where a ton of other people can, can hear them and respond to them. And that has turned out to be helpful for me in terms of trying to make those ideals and those values something that I practice. And I mean practice in both the sense of praxis, as in taking a theory and making a sort of practical enacted thing, but also practice like you practice a musical instrument, like try to get more skillful at something by doing it regularly until it comes more naturally.

Hannah McGregor: [02:26](#) And I do think I have gotten more skillful at asking for help. I think that is particularly something I have learned how to do well in my friendships and my personal relationships. It's maybe something I'm not as great at in my work relationships where it

often feels less like asking for help and more like asking other people to take on work that I don't have the capacity for. And I'm always really hesitant to make more work for other people. That's a challenge for me. But I am also not great at letting go of control. I like to be the boss of things when they matter to me. And that means that a lot of the time I don't ask for help, not because I don't need it or don't think that I would receive it, but because maybe deep down inside some part of me doesn't want it.

Hannah McGregor: [03:28](#)

And that feeling is one that has been, mm, bubbling to the surface of late. I had a really interesting experience recently during a production meeting for my other podcast, *Witch, Please!*, in which my collaborator, Marcel and I were talking about the different kinds of work we've been doing on that project. The goal was just to itemize the work that we're putting into it to figure out how many hours a month we're spending on it to figure out what we want to ask for on Patreon, because we are trying to make that project one in which we are paid for the work that we're doing. As opposed to this project, which has been funded by a grant and so is more readily folded into the work of my actual job as an academic. So anyway, we're just listing the work that we're doing and I was finding myself getting kind of like snippy about the way I was talking about the work I was doing. And during the meeting I didn't really have the perspective to notice that I was doing that or understand where it was coming from. But afterwards I was thinking about how the meeting had gone and thinking, "Oh gosh Hannah, you got a little rude there. Where was that coming from?" Speaking of being skillful, you know what I'm incredibly skillful at? It is picking apart and micro analyzing social interactions I've had with other people and the ways in which I might've messed them up. Anyway, I realized that part of that snippiness was coming from the fact that I had taken on more tasks in relation to this project than I had the capacity for and had in no way communicated that to any of my collaborators or asked them for help or to take on those tasks I didn't have the capacity for. And why was that?

Hannah McGregor: [05:25](#)

It wasn't a lack of trust in my collaborators or their competence or a lack of comfort with them. And so, as I thought about it, I realized that it was coming from a place of desire for control. A kind of stress reaction, right. Life right now is really stressful and this is one of my stress reactions. That I want more control. I want fewer variables. I want to be able to see all the moving parts of everything that I'm involved in and know where they're at and be the person who can just see how everything fits together. And it is not a helpful instinct. The helpful instinct is to

relax the clenched fist of control and invite my collaborators in and create models for work that are based on generosity and reciprocity and asking for help. And as part of this realization, I've, I've been thinking about how that desire to become more skillful at collaborating and sharing and asking for help in professional settings, as well as interpersonal ones —how that I think is a, is a thing we might also usefully keep in mind as we think about effective models for mentorship. That it is important in mentorship relationships to understand how power moves and how power structures different institutions. As Lily Cho pointed out in the last episode, mentorship relationships that pretend that there aren't hierarchies or power structures are often harmful. But I'm also interested in what it looks like to imagine the possibility of more lateral and non-hierarchical relationships. Ones in which mentor and mentee help each other. And I'm particularly interested in how recognizing the ways in which others can help you, can also be a way of, of seeing them, of paying attention to them and seeing the ways in which they are skillful and valuing those skills. Asking for help in work settings is scary because it is vulnerable-making and in high-performance sectors like academia, we are taught not to look vulnerable, not to look weak, not to ever look like we don't want more work. Like we don't want to take on more things. But actually I think that's a really good argument for why we should do it. We can start to break down the workaholic cultures of these kinds of sectors by saying when we're overwhelmed, saying when we've bit off more than we can chew, and asking other people to help us out. It feels interesting, even exciting for me to think about how a basic skill like this, asking for help, is one that I can keep practicing and keep exploring and keep finding new ways to become more skillful. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

- Hannah McGregor: [08:37](#) Alright, let's take a look at what's in our Killjoy Survival Kits. [Sound Effect: Chest Creaking Open].
- Hannah McGregor: [08:48](#) Here's something from Holly, who writes, "The most visited staple in the arsenal of my killjoy survival items is a satisfying and nutritious meal. The physical act of giving your body what it needs to thrive and grow can be reflective of how we both think of and tend to ourselves, bodies and otherwise. This doesn't necessarily mean an expensive or lavish meal for me. It can be simple and homemade as long as it is pleasurable and nourishing. Preparing myself something tasty that keeps me alive reminds me that I am capable of bringing joy and also taking care of myself. When I prepare the same to share with

others, that feeling is multiplied. In these times I am thankful that this feeling has not been taken away from me. And I look forward to making those I love a fine meal to share in that feeling again, when it is safe. In the meantime, donating to those in need of a good meal is never a bad idea. A good meal is my ultimate care for myself (and others) as it encompasses both joy and life. Here's to soup, sourdough, veggies, sandwiches, herbs, spices, whatever food makes you feel good. And the phrase joy as an act of resistance." Thanks so much for that, Holly. It is such a beautiful killjoy survival item that rather than adding anything else this week, I'm just going to amplify it. I hope everyone has the time and capacity to feed themselves a nourishing and satisfying meal this week. And if you've got a little extra to give, check out your local food bank.

Hannah McGregor: [10:24](#)

Don't forget to email me at secretfeministagenda@gmail.com to share what's in your survival kit. 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). You can also rate and review the show. Thanks this week to KarenSD for your very lovely review. 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 territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations where I'm grateful to live and work. first nations where I'm grateful to live and work. This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

Hannah McGregor: [11:13](#)

This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on.