

Episode 4.29 Saying No! Again! Forever!

November 20, 2020

Hannah McGregor: [00:11](#) [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda* and I'm coming to you today with the last *Secret Feminist Agenda* minisode. There's one more episode to come, a final interview that, for me, sums up in so many ways the project of *Secret Feminist Agenda* and the kinds of conversations that this podcast has prioritized. But this episode is the last time that I'm going to, I guess, sit down in front of this microphone with only a vague idea of what I'm gonna talk about, and then ad lib my way through some sort of mini essay of sorts. As a reminder, the podcast isn't going away entirely. I just am using this opportunity to re-imagine what I think this project can do. And really taking a step back in order to have some space to re-imagine things is connected to what I want to talk about today. To my last *Secret Feminist Agenda*... [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

Hannah McGregor: [01:12](#) Because this is an ending of a sort, I want to return to something that I have talked about so many times on this podcast, and that is: saying no. Gosh, we talk about it a lot. But talking about it a lot has not made me necessarily get much better at it. It certainly hasn't made it easier. It's still something I really struggle with. And I want to talk about it today for a couple of reasons. One is that I think saying no is really wrapped up with the kinds of conversations about mentorship and shifting phases of your career that we've been touching on for the last few episodes. And the other reason is that bringing this podcast to an end, at least in its current form is for me a really big act of saying no.

Hannah McGregor: [02:12](#) I keep thinking about something a friend of mine said recently on the group chat, which is that we talk a lot about saying no and boundaries as being really vital forms of self-care and ways to do your work sustainably without —or at least trying to minimize burnout and that in the current sort of crisis filled world that we all living in boundaries and recognizing your limitations is more important than ever. But as this friend pointed out, despite all of the emphasis on saying, no, we rarely have conversations about what we say no to. And about the fact

that part of saying no involves say no to things that you would really like to be saying yes to. And for me, putting *Secret Feminist Agenda* in its current form to bed is a big act of saying no to something that I love doing that I love making, but I need to say no to this project so that I can say yes to other things that I am also really excited about.

Hannah McGregor: [03:20](#)

And part of why I need to say no to this project is that it was a project of a time and place. It was a response to a need that I felt very, very acutely when I started making *Secret Feminist Agenda*, which was a need for community, a need for conversation, but also a need for a project that I could do pretty much entirely on my own because I had just started at a new institution. I hadn't built up an intellectual community. I had just switched disciplines, functionally, you know, from English literature to publishing studies. And I hadn't found my people in publishing yet. You know, I didn't have that network, that community of people who I could imagine projects with. And so what I needed to do was imagine a project that I could basically create myself. Now, there's been some fundamental collaborative pieces to this project.

Hannah McGregor: [04:23](#)

One of those is obviously my ongoing collaboration with Siobhan McMenemy and the development of the peer review process. That work, that sort of vital feedback that has been such an important part of this work. And that has sort of built the, the groundwork for the Amplify Podcast Network, which is sort of the next stage of this work for me, that all would have been impossible on my own. And of course, all of the interview episodes are themselves fundamentally collaborative because the podcast was for me about reaching out and finding that community. But at the end of the day, I created a podcast that I research, host, produce, book, edit, post, promote 100% by myself on my own timeline, on my own schedule, under my own steam, because I wanted something that that could be mine. Because that's what I needed at the time. And now that I am sort of further into this process of, of building the kind of academic community that I'm looking for and building the kinds of collaborations that excite me, not only do I not feel the desire for a project that is so, so totally me doing all of the pieces, but actually I find it kind of boring sometimes, you know, compared to *Witch, Please*, which, you know, was my original podcast that I rebooted this fall that I make with Marcelle and with a team of excellent producers at Not Sorry Productions and that I get to constantly be bouncing ideas off other people and collaborating with them and seeing how the work grows through the different skill sets they bring into it.

- Hannah McGregor: [06:05](#) And that is really exciting for me in a way that making something by myself is less exciting right now. At the end of the day, though, even if that particular need hadn't shifted so much for me, I've really taken to heart a point that Cheryl Ball made in her peer review of the very first season which is that projects need ends. And how do we know when a podcast is done? A lot of the podcasts that I admire most are podcasts that have been running for years and years and years and continue to run for years and years and years. And their consistency is so comforting to me as is the ability to listen along and listen to the hosts change and grow over time and I think part of me always imagined being that kind of podcaster. But the reality of it is that I've got a very time-consuming day job.
- Hannah McGregor: [07:04](#) And while I am lucky enough that I can fit my podcasting into this work because my podcasting constitutes part of my research output —again, it also well to quote Cheryl Ball is a massive amount of content. [Laughs] And she finishes that sentence, "and I do not understand how she is pulling this off on the regular." Now, granted, I switched from a weekly to a fortnightly release schedule. But, again, the reality at the end of the day is that every time I say yes to one thing I say no to a different thing. And things that I have said no to include speaking engagements, requests for feedback on other people's podcasting, opportunities to mentor people or to peer review work, chances to think through these ideas in other mediums, such as writing, which I still love and still want to have time for, chances to imagine new podcasting projects or to fully invest my time and energy in the other projects like *Witch, Please*, and *The SpokenWeb Podcast* that I'm also involved in.
- Hannah McGregor: [08:14](#) But when I say yes to time consuming commitments, even ones that I am excited about, I also say no to taking my evenings off, to reading for pleasure, to going for walks in the rain with friends. For me, this kind of thinking is less about a kind of scarcity approach, right —every time I take something up, I lose something else — and more about budgeting my energy and taking the opportunity to take a step back every once in a while and say, okay, where's my energy going and how does that align with my values? How does that align with what I actually want to be doing? In fact saying no, in a lot of ways for me is about shedding that scarcity thinking that is constantly saying, this will be the last opportunity. This will be the last chance. This will be the last time you get to do this thing.
- Hannah McGregor: [09:09](#) This will be the last time somebody offers you something or asks you to something or invites you to something. And, and that sort of panic scarcity thinking is, is for me, at least the

mentality that leads to me saying yes to so many things that I end up not being able to give them the time and the care and the energy that I want to. I mean, part of this is also that there are just, there are just some things we'd all like to say no to that we can't at the end of the day, a lot of our yeses are sort of taken up via commitments that may be impossible to say no to. To limitations and restrictions that at least for the time being, we can't work our way out of. You know I'm thinking largely about capitalism, but I'm also thinking about how, for example, white supremacy has been theorized as something that wastes Black people's time.

Hannah McGregor: [10:02](#)

I'm thinking about the undue burdens of emotional labour and additional service within the university that are disproportionately placed on women of colour. I'm thinking about the erasure of forms of particularly domestic labour that are still disproportionately gendered, but are almost never considered as part of what we were saying no or saying yes to. I'm thinking about how even the opportunity to say no, or say yes deliberately and with intention is an incredible privilege. And I'm thinking about the fact that just because something's a privilege doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. That is to say that just because saying no is part of this kind of career, you know, an academic career, for example, where you get to make a lot of choices about the path that you're going to follow. You know, recognizing that that's a privilege doesn't mean one shouldn't say no to things.

Hannah McGregor: [11:00](#)

It means one should think really long and hard about the values that are informing those nos and those yeses. I recently saw someone else on Twitter— and I'll share the link if I can find it —talking through their own rationale about what they say no to and what they say yes to. And it was a really strikingly frank communication of values, of a value centered approach to making these kinds of decisions. I come back to these conversations about saying no again and again, because there is so much power in the act of refusal and in the related opening up of possibility and opportunity that often comes with refusal. This is for me, one of the great lessons of the the feminist killjoy, that she says no to patriarchal and white supremacist forms of joy so that she can say yes to real joys. That often we need to be the killjoy to open up other possibilities and other ways of imagining how we can be in the world, alone and together. It is hard to know when to end things. And it is exciting to imagine what those endings are going to make possible. I am really excited to stop recording this podcast for a while and to have some time to think about what it might become, to think about the kinds of possibilities that I might be

able to open up and to think about maybe spending a little less time concerned about the sound of my upstairs neighbors vacuuming [Laughs]. At least for the time being. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

Hannah McGregor: [12:44](#)

That's it for this episode of *Secret Feminist Agenda*. As always, you can find show notes and the rest of the episodes on secretfeministagenda.com. You can follow me on Twitter @hkpmcgregor, and you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag #secretfeministagenda. 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. This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on. [Theme Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]