

Episode 3.5 Ableism and Doing a Bit Better Every Day

November 2, 2018

Hannah (Host):

[00:08](#)

[Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. I'm really tempted to also start this episode by wishing you a Happy Halloween, but that's just because it's actually, Halloween today, this moment as I'm recording this episode. And it's an entirely inappropriate thing to wish you because by the time you listen to this episode in two days, it will be November 2nd, and that is the least spooky day of the year. That's probably not-- November is pretty spooky month. Anyway, not gonna talk about Halloween and I'm also not going to talk about the actual primary thing that is on my mind, because I don't know how to talk about it, and so I'm just going to reference it and in order to reference it, I'm going to read for you the description off a GoFundMe that is also shared in the show notes for this episode. These are the words of Amanda Leduc who writes, "On October 29, 2018, Christie Blatchford published an article in the National Post stating that Steven Galloway was suing a total of 20 individuals, including the woman who had initially accused him of sexual assault, for defamation of character. The article publicly outed the woman formerly known only as the Main Complainant, and also named several other individuals in the CanLit community. According to the article, the claim seeks," quote "'unspecified general, special and aggravated damages and a permanent injunction "requiring the defendants to remove the defamatory words from the internet and every other public postings" and restraining them from any further publishing," end quote, "this fundraiser has been set up to help defray some of the initial legal expenses for the defendants. All monies received from this fundraiser will go directly toward the legal costs incurred for the case." I'm not going to read the rest of the description. Like I said, the link is in the show notes. What I want to add for context is that a lot of people who are very dear to me are named in this suit, including my very dear friend, and often collaborator, Marcelle Kosman. So follow the link, go read more about the suit, give if you can. And if you want a little bit more context, you might want to go back and listen to episode 2.1, the first episode of season two, where I explained some of the background to the story. But I'm not yet sure how to talk about people I really love getting sued for defamation. So for the time being, I'm not. I'm just going to ask you to go take a look at that link and I'm going to leave it there, and instead I'm going to talk about something else that has been very much on my mind. What we might say is an ongoing personal secret feminist

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agenda. So let's talk about it. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

Hannah (Host):

[03:11](#)

An ongoing agenda for me, and one that is very much an inward facing, is the need to continue to work on the kinds of ableism that I have internalized and often repeat unselfconsciously. Since beginning *Secret Feminist Agenda*, I have had a number of listeners reach out to me always in very gentle, and tender, and generous ways pointing out various kinds of instances of ableism. Those might include, you know, an early episode where I talked about having really personally internalized the idea that your productivity is synonymous with your value. And somebody saying like, you know, "it's one thing to say that about yourself, but actually think about how ableist that is as a general idea," which was just a profoundly productive thing for me to hear because, in fact, really sort of processing the intense ableism of hyper-productivity culture was, for me, an incredibly powerful way to, to continue to work on, sort of, dismantling that in my own life and also in the way that I relate to students and to other people who ask me for advice about academic careers. It's really shifted the way that I have those conversations around, sort of, what it looks like to be productive, or effective, or successful. Another instance was a listener reaching out to point out that I had really delayed the process of getting transcriptions done for the podcast and that, that that delay was an indication of how I wasn't really actively, on an ongoing basis, thinking about what accessibility meant in terms of the work I was putting out in the world. And that, again, very, very gently phrased intervention, or reminder, was for me a prompt that then led to a significant improvement in this project that I'm working on because I, I step back and actually took incorporating transcriptions into my workflow seriously. And, and now we're finding ways to move forward with that. My collaborators at Wilfrid Laurier University Press are also contributing to that. And I've learned a ton about transcription and how it works, and it's without a doubt made the work this podcast is doing better. P.S. transcriptions for season two will be going up anytime now. A listener commented on the most recent episode, episode 3.4, pointing out that I had casually used a number of instances of ableist language, both referring to, to "being blinded," in a sort of metaphorical capacity. And then also referring to things being "stupid." And it really got me thinking again, it was a very sort of generous intervention, that giving me the benefit of the doubt in terms of what my intentions are as a podcaster, assuming, in a way that people are not required to assume, that I don't want to be doing harm with the ways that I speak, and then providing me with resources to educate myself and figure out how to do

better. And it was again, another opportunity for me to take a step back and say, "okay," you know, "how have I already been working on, on noticing ableism in my own, in my own language?" The sort of metaphorical use of terms like "blind spot" has been a particular challenge for me. Just getting into the habit of noticing when I say it, so I can check myself and find alternatives. And weeding out language like "stupid" and "idiot" is something that I haven't even begun to do. I'll the resource that this listener offered in order to, sort of, understand those different kinds of vocabulary changes and why they're important. It's an article called "Doing Social Justice: Thoughts on Ableist Language and Why it Matters." And it's a really, really fantastic summary of, sort of, how ableist language operates and why it is worth everyone's concerted effort to really interrogate how it's present in our own vocabularies, and really actively work on finding alternatives, finding better ways to talk. And I particularly appreciate moments like that, moments of listeners, you know, pointing these things out because, sort of, a defining characteristic of what it means to be participating in a system like ableism is that, you know, I've incorporated this kind of language into my vocabulary unthinkingly and unselfconsciously, and I often need to be, sort of, stopped in that moment and reminded, "Oh, you just use this word, probably that's not the word you meant. Maybe try for a different one," in the same way that people have, have lovingly and gently interrupted me and said, "sorry, those aren't my pronouns," or "sorry, that's not how you pronounce my name." You know, those moments where, where people really, sort of, offer you the, the generous and care-based work of helping you, or in this case, helping me to, to keep trying to be more thoughtful and more self-conscious.

Speaker 3:

[08:29](#)

Interestingly, these, these various kinds of incidents had been percolating in my mind. And then this morning I read a short thread on Twitter by Chelsea Vowel, who's @âpihtawikosisân on Twitter. I'll, I'll link to this thread as well. The thread is about Chelsea having used that, that Spongebob meme. You might know it. And that having been pointed out that that meme is ableist. And so here's what Chelsea says, "I'm going to be deleting that and refraining from using it in the future. I'm very sorry for using it and for the way it has probably made people feel. It's yet another example of how pervasive ableism is and how much more difficult it is to get rid of, in my opinion. Like, I'm speaking for myself here. I struggle with ableism more than anything else. It is so ingrained, and it has taken so long to get to the point where I'm aware of it at all. Excising it from my actions, vocabulary, thoughts is going to be an ongoing struggle." And then the thread concludes, "and when I fuck up

as I will, I have to deal with it." And that really struck me that, you know, Chelsea saying that that ableism has been one of the hardest, most ingrained forms of oppression to try to work on and to unlearn. That really resonated with me. In a lot of ways that has been, you know, amongst the, the sometimes seemingly countless forms of unthinking oppressions that I have internalized and I'd have to work on unlearning, ableism is one that I feel like I'm comparatively quite, sort of, early on in my thinking. And so you know, in addition to, to, sort of, sharing these, these various interventions with you, I also want to tell you about a book that I am reading. That book is called *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*. It is a very recent publication from Arsenal Pulp Press, which I love, and it is by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, who is an incredibly rad, queer, disabled femme writer, organizer, performance artist and educator. I am only maybe a quarter of the way through this book and I have probably had my mind blown as dozen times. It's an incredibly thoughtful introduction to disability justice, and to the origins of disability justice in the work of queer and trans Black, Indigenous, and people of color artists and activists. It's doing all kinds of things that keep, sort of, catching me off guard. Right from the beginning, from from having the acknowledgements at the beginning of the book as a way of, sort of, foregrounding the way that that knowledge is created collectively and in community. It's just been an incredible read so far and I'm really excited to finish it. And normally I would wait to finish a book before recommending it, but in this particular case it felt so timely to be reading this book right at this moment, right as I read Chelsea's thread, right as I received this listener feedback, and I thought that I would share this recommendation with all of you and share an ongoing agenda of my own. Alright. It's Halloween and I want to go eat some candy. So let's hear from Kaarina. [Music: "I Will" by Mitski]

Kaarina:

[12:07](#)

Hello and welcome to Kaarina's Cozy Self Care Corner. This week has been a pretty intense week. I feel like I say that every episode, but I particularly mean it this time. I'm sure many of you are feeling that too. This week I am taking pleasure in autumn, which is truly my favorite season. And specifically I'm taking pleasure in the textures and sounds of autumn. So one of my favorite things to do is to collect acorns and chestnuts from around my neighbourhood and bring them home. And at any given time I have one or two acorns or chestnuts in my pocket just so I have something to touch throughout the day. I just love the smoothness of them. I love the shape of them. I find it very calming. Another great sound of autumn is crunching leaves, and it's always so satisfying to get out there and crunch some dead, dying leaves. Just, you know, stroll on through those

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carcasses and just appreciate the full impact that your body can have on that decomposing major. That pleasure has been dimmed a bit by some rain. I'm sure that there's still some leave crunching time left in Halifax, and I hope there is some time left for you, wherever you live. Sleeping with the window open and feeling that cold night breeze come in, and all those cold night smells. And my final sense-based pleasure is gourds and all things, all autumn squashes. So going down to the market and seeing the piles and piles of decorative and edible gourds and squashes available, picking out your favorite one based on color, or texture, or shape, using it to decorate your house or make your next meal. So no concrete self care tips this week, but if you love autumn as much as I do, I hope you're taking the time to enjoy all of these fairly fleeting and truly wonderful sensations. The sounds, the smells, the touch, the riot of color. I'm going to go to the park this weekend and swoon over all the trees. So have a great weekend. [Music: "I Will" by Mitski]

Hannah (Host):

[14:51](#)

Don't forget to check out the show notes as well as the rest of the episodes of *Secret Feminist Agenda* at secretfeministagenda.com. You can follow me on Twitter @hkpcgregor. You can follow Kaarina @Kaarinasaurus, and you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag #secretfeministagenda. I'm going right now to check if there are any new reviews on Apple Podcasts. This is a real time update. The realtime update is that there are in fact, oh my god, look at all of these delightful new reviews. There are new reviews from SimianBeing. Oh, that's B E I N G. I can't say it because of my accent. And from Grace Joe, and from MissBossy18, and from Ari53117, which might be a fun internet thing that I don't get because I often mess internet things. Thank you all so much. That is, what a, what a delightful surprise to have opened that page and found all of those exciting new reviews. My goodness, you're all great. 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. Kaarina's theme song is "I Will" by Mitski. *Secret Feminist Agenda* is recorded on the traditional and unceded territory 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. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]