

Episode 2.8 Being Bad at Poker with Emily Riddle

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Hannah (Host): [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Welcome back. It's always a god joy to hang out with you all, but I'm feeling extra excited for this mini-episode series on play. Last week I talked about losing and failing, and this week we're going to dive into some specific forms of play. Since announcing the series, I've had a few folks reach out with unexpected ideas about what play might entail and I'm excited to bring them into the conversation too. But to start, let's go meet Emily. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Emily Riddle is Nehiyaw from Treaty 6 and a member of the Alexander First Nation. She lives in Vancouver on the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh people's. She works in First Nations education policy and is hopefully finishing up a political theory MA in the near future. She has recently published articles in Canadian Art and Teen Vogue. Dealing in a casino taught her how to stand up for herself. She misses the prairies and is always plotting how return. [Music: "There's Your Trouble" by The Dixie Chicks]

Hannah (Host): We are sitting in my apartment. We have had the ritual meeting of the cats and drinking of the tea, all the very important parts of my home. And Emily also brought cake, which is exciting. And then I immediately rubbed all of the recording equipment in it so that, that was a pretty smooth move as well. And the inspiration for the conversation we're going to have today was a tweet that you wrote like, maybe a month ago or so, were you sort of referenced in passing the really interesting gender dynamics of a job you used to have. And I was like, what This is so interesting. I want to know everything about this. And that's, that is, that is why I asked if you could come and have a conversation on record because that's just how I like to have all of my conversations, into mics. So will you tell us a little bit about what that job was?

Emily: Definitely. So between undergrad that I finished at U of A and moving here to do graduate school, I was working for a professor at U of A but doing part time work on sort of like critical Cree economies and I needed a bit more funds, more work, so I didn't want to find super serious office job for that time off. So I applied at the River Creek Casino, which is on a reserve just outside of Edmonton, Enoch. And so I worked as a blackjack dealer for almost a year there. And then I ended up, I dealt a few other games. I dealt Bach and props games but mostly blackjack. And so in working in the casino I kind of got into poker a bit, mostly because on Saturday nights after work, which was like at 4:00 AM, a lot of the dealers would play a house game of poker. And so that's sort of my foray into poker was working in the casino and playing house games with them.

Hannah (Host): I do not understand poker or blackjack or how either of them work. So they seem just like fascinating, unfamiliar practices. Like, tell me more. And I, and I am going to ask you to tell me more, but let's start with, let's start with

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blackjack and then we will move on to poker. I'm really interested in what being a blackjack dealer in a casino is like. What does your day look like? What does your interaction with the players look like? Also, just really quickly, what is blackjack?

Emily: [Laughs] Blackjack is a card game where you're trying to count to 21. So you're, everyone gets dealt one card up and then one card down and then they have to ask for more cards. And sometimes if they get over 21 then you're busted and you lose your hand. And if you get to 21 it's blackjack and you get paid double the amount of money or time and a half, sorry, for blackjack. And then if you win you just get paid one to one. So that's the first game you learn when you become a casino dealer, because it's just the most popular, and also I guess probably the most simple. So you take a two week course, in Canada anyways, United States you have to pay to go to dealer school, and it's like this big thing, but in Canada you, you take a two week course and then you have to do a test at the end in front of a bunch of what they called pit bosses, which are like the managers of the floor. So I passed my first time, which was shocking to me because I felt like I made so many mistakes in that test and then they put you on the floor to deal, which is super nerve wracking and also just very strange because it's so much money. Like, I think you become desensitized eventually to how much money it is. But, and I ended up dealing in high limit quite a bit in blackjack, which was also super interesting because people are playing like \$5,000 per hand. Yeah. So that was the foray into blackjack.

Hannah (Host): Yeah. That sounds really intense. And that experience of like, you've had two weeks of training now here go into the real world is a real like, "oh thank you. I'll just hold a thousand dollars in my hand now shall I?" I guess you don't touch real money do you?

Emily: You do.

Hannah (Host): Do you really?

Emily: Yeah. So you have to change out money for chips. So if it's over \$100 you have to get it checked by the pit boss. If not, if it's under \$100, you just do it and put the money, there's a little slot that you have to down.

Hannah (Host): I've worked my fair share of like, retail jobs, but they were always like, a bakery. It's like, you just don't handle a lot of money. It's like \$20 worth of bread. Okay. So blackjack dealing and then you got into poker. So the poker was just with colleagues for the— "Colleagues," is that what you call the people you work at a casino with, your colleagues? Were you put mostly playing with coworkers?

Emily: It was mostly coworkers. We'd always have the game on Saturday night, which was, I got roped into going once and I had never played poker, which is super nerve wracking, like particularly playing with dealers because I had a few regular house games in Vancouver, but it's super different playing with dealers because

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you feel like you could, they see the cards more and also with poker dealers because they really know the rules. But yeah, that's kinda how I got into poker and then into playing a bit more like, tournaments and things and casinos like that too. But mostly house games.

Hannah (Host): Oh my God. I'm going to ask you about those tournaments in a second, but first can you give me the same like, super basic intro to how poker works that you gave for blackjack?

Emily: Well, maybe. There's lots of different kinds of poker, but it's mostly Texas hold 'em. So it's a game where everyone gets dealt cards, two cards for Texas hold 'em and then there's communal cards in the middle. I'm trying to be like, "how do I say this very easily?"

Hannah (Host): I like really appreciate it.

Emily: [Laughs] And then there's communal cards in the middle and they kind of get flipped out eventually. So you go through rounds of betting and then more cards in the middle are exposed. And so there's different denominations of how like how good your hand is, like a royal flush being the best, or like, starts with a pair, things like that. So you have to learn first, like all the different tiers of hands and then, and then also like the betting scheme too.

Hannah (Host): So what is involved in becoming good at poker?

Emily: I don't know. I think some people are just like, can, I think a lot of it is psychological, being able to read people. I think the basic thing is knowing the rules. Like, that's actually it's a big thing to know like the stream of betting and all the different like tiers of hands and all the rules, especially even just for Texas hold 'em. There's like so many different kinds of poker. But I think a lot of it is psychological, being able to read people. I think being ballsy enough to put out bets sometimes. It really depends on how you want to play. Like some people say you "play tight" means you're not playing big bets, and then some people will just be kind of like, more reckless with their playing too. So, and it depends on who you're playing with I think, which is what I think really interesting as a woman playing poker is that when you get to a table— not when you're playing a game and people know you because it's a little different than like people usually know how I'm gonna play or, or think they do anyways— but if I'm playing a tournament and you get to the table, there's kind of like, a sweet spot where they assume you don't know how to play because you're a woman and so you kind of have a few moments to like, to get them a little bit. And then once they figure it out I feel like there's more eyes on you on the table. Yeah.

Hannah (Host): Okay. So this is where we, we're getting to the content of the tweet in question, which was like the gender politics of playing poker. Right? So, you know, furthering in on my, my general ignorance about this world when I like picture,

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when I picture a poker game— I feel like there was a Mel Gibson movie where he played poker that also had Jodie Foster in it?

Emily: Oh, what is that movie called?

Hannah (Host): What is that movie called? Nobody tell us. We'll never look it up. But like, that basic dynamic of like, poker is a men's game and a woman who participates in it is automatically an object of fascination and fetishization, derision, all of those kinds of, sort of masculinized attention that happens when you are a woman participating in a male activity. I think if you would ask me, I would've said like that's an antiquated idea. Like that's, you know, that's a 19th century version of what a poker game looks like. Is it in fact still kind of what it's like being a woman playing poker?

Emily: I think so. Like even in my house games, it's, it's mostly men playing with my friends, and then certainly when you go play a tournament in a casino, which maybe there's like eight tables at the start of the tournament, there might be like one other woman in the room. And you like, look at each other. Sometimes more. Like, I think casinos have started to do like, ladies nights of poker and stuff like that, but still super male dominated and I feel like a space that like men leave to go have their bro time and yeah. So, and it's also really different. I feel like it was probably half and half dealing, but the people that you're dealing to in a casino or mostly men, mostly repeat customers. Like, it is a very masculine space too. Yeah. Why? It's so odd to me. There is a poker documentary, and I don't remember the name either, so we're messing up all the poker movies in our references. But I, there's someone that was quoting in the poker documentary that was like, "oh, this is like the sport where there could be like Jay-Z playing Donald Trump," or whatever. Like people that are successful, successful. I don't want to say Donald Trump's successful. It feels kind of gross, but he's rich. That can play each other and like, or professional athletes could play people and so this is something like in both like sit down at a table and be equal at. So I think that's interesting that like there's not more women in poker considering there's no reason. A lot of it is marketing. Like if you look at World Series of Poker, it's like, I think the last time a woman made the final table was like 1995 or something like that, like a long time ago. And then also like, all the women in poker who like get sponsorship— because it is like a sport— are all like, thin, conventionally attractive white women who are sort of like, fetishized in a certain way too.

Hannah (Host): All those things make it sound so much like, sort of the many other like male dominated spheres. Right? Which is, you know, when you, when you start to apply pressure to it, you ask yourself like, how did it become like this? And I'd venture to say that spheres that are still dominated by men are the ones where there's still money to be made and power to be accrued. Like, like when things are sort of opened up so that women can participate, it often goes hand in hand with those things like, losing their cultural status or losing their attachment to or both. And then the sort of what women are allowed in, it's a woman who sort of align as closely as possible with patriarchal and white supremacist ideas of what

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a woman should be, which we see in professional sports and the tech world. Right? Like, it's not a coincidence that Facebook produced the "lean in" version of feminism, right? Like, that's the kind of woman you have to be to work in those fields. And I, another thing I'm, this is a question, it's a theory and therefore a question because you know this stuff better than me. I wonder if, as in the tech world, there is a discourse in poker of men are inherently better at it than women. Is that a thing you hear or an impression that you get of the attitude about women playing poker?

Emily:

I think so. I think like, in my experience of trying to introduce women to poker, they're really like, generally afraid to make mistakes in front of people, which I think is sort of, I don't know, women are, are not encouraged to make mistakes or like, be gregarious and those sort of spaces. And so I think even in playing sort of like, women's poker sometimes I'm like, "oh, why are we all talking? Like I just want to play." So I have to deal with like my own internalized sexism. I'm like, "why are women bad at poker? Because we talked too much." But that's fine, like sometimes it's not about that. Like, it's like, poker is as much about like the social situation and it's awkward to play with people who are totally silent or people that want to wear their sunglasses and put their headphones on. It's like not what home games are about, for me. It's like you definitely learn more about the people you're playing with. Ooh, text messages. What was the theory? Sorry?

Hannah (Host):

I mean, I'm just thinking, you know, I'm, I'm, I'm drawing this like possibly specious connection between tech culture and poker as like areas that are dominated by dudes because there's money in power attached to them. Right? Like that's, that's the most, my, this is my conspiracy theories that tech culture is dominated by men because you can make a lot of money doing it, and so a lot of men are invested in a narrative of women being biologically less prone or less, less talented at whatever the thing is. Right? So like I'm thinking of the sort of the Google memo and that, that dude who wrote an internal memo about how like women don't work at Google because our brains are bad at computers, which I'm not really— sorry, I'm doing no favorites of feminism by being like "how do cards work? I don't know. But I don't know. And part of I think why, I don't know is that I have also always had the impression that like, if I played poker and was bad at it, everybody would laugh at me. There is that like, when you don't get into these things because you know all eyes are on you waiting for you to fail. So the theory that I'm forwarding, or the question I'm asking is: do you think that there is a sense that like as with the stem fields, that poker is about counting and math and odds and that kind of thinking and that lady brains just aren't good at that.

Emily:

Yeah, I can definitely see that because like people who play a lot of poker or like calculating the statistics in their head about hands and when you watch it on TV that's what it is. Like, it is math. But I think there is an attitude that I heard working casinos that women make better dealers and it's because they're more like, or supposedly more emotionally perceptive. And I think that poker is just as much about that too, as like you can calculate the statistics but someone could

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like, totally be fucking with you and, and have nothing on their hand, right. Just be totally bluffing. So, but there's obviously like, a lot of power to be held in poker. There's like a lot of money to be made, and it's a huge business and it was on TV and people get sponsorship deals and all this sort of stuff. So. And I think also women don't get as much recreation time in general or historically. So I think that that like been a male dominated spaces like, men would go off and have their recreation time.

Hannah (Host): Men's poker night is absolutely like, a trope that I have somewhere in my head as like a thing, you know, we go and do it to get away from the wife. And what is the wife doing? Like, probably caring for family. Like, probably taking care of the children or, or something comparable, which is, I mean you all know what that is. Something. Something is what it is. So it is really interesting to hear you say that both playing poker and dealing require kind of like, emotional intelligence that like, makes you better at those things because I don't think that there's a lot of examples of like, careers that have or jobs that have like, cultural capital or prestige attached to them that rely on emotional intelligence. Those are usually sort of demoted as less important skillsets. So I guess my question is: how important do you think emotional intelligence is in like dealing and slash or playing poker and do you think that those skills are like, actually valued or like, something that sort of nobody talks about being important? Also, would you like some more hot water for your tea?

Emily: I'm okay.

Hannah (Host): Okay.

Emily: That's super interesting. I never thought about how like, feminized labor, like care jobs. I've always like, often like women doing them, but I've never really thought of dealing as like, fitting in with that or, or playing poker too. Yeah, that is interesting. Well I think like, in general you can get into some pretty tricky situations when you're dealing. Like, I think that's when people were the meanest to me ever. I think dealing like, you are supposed to be in general kind of a robot, and there is a camera watching everything you're doing and you mess up, you have to call the pit boss over to fix it, which can be quite a volatile situation too, depending. And people are drinking. And in Alberta tables are open till 3:00 AM now, so you're dealing pretty late in the evening. Things can get kind of debaucherous. And so like, being a young woman dealing like, face lots of, lots of comments and things. Yeah. And also just like, being on the reserve and like being white passing too, and then hearing people talk about being on the reserve and dealing was like, another level too. In terms of, yeah, I think like, obviously being an accurate and quick dealer, because for the casino they want you to have a certain amount of hounds per hour so they can bring money in, so it is about that. But also being able to deescalate situations like, between you and a player, you and a pit boss, you and the floor manager, or like between, yeah, between players. There's a lot of dynamics and emotions going on and yeah, that men are not able to regulate their emotions often when they lose a lot of money. Yeah. So I think you have to become like, I became little bit

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desensitized from it because like, people are always like, "oh, did you feel bad taking all that money from people?" Which is interesting because you're like, "wow, I don't know how like you lost \$50,000 in this hour that I dealt to you." And so when you deal in a casino, you work on the floor for an hour and then you get a 20 minute break, and then you moved to a different table. So you're never at the table for that long. So you know, if there's like, some dude who is calling me like terrible names or being rude, I can call over the pit boss. And honestly, depending on who the pit boss was, I would do that and they would kick him out. Sometimes I knew that the dude behind me— it was almost all men that were managers— will not have my back, so there's no point in calling them over. But yeah. So you work for an hour and then you get to get rid of them. But in terms of like, I did make some, make some jokes with the other Cree pit bosses like, "oh you took so much money for that guy in an hour." Like, "Oh yeah, I did it for my people." Like it's interesting like, taking money from white people to go to a Cree reserve too. It's not the reserve I'm from, but that's an interesting dynamic too. But I think yeah, being a, you have to be somewhat comforting to these people like you, there is a line where you can't encourage them to gamble. Like you not supposed to, you're not supposed to give them advice about what they're doing. It's also to sort of like, AGLC policy, like Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, there's like, rules about what you're supposed to say. And if someone comes to you for help with their gambling addiction, you do have to direct them to the right resources too. So there's like, a significant amount of emotional labor and taking money from people.

Hannah (Host):

Oh, that is, that is, that is a lot and I'm thinking about like, the very real forms of like, care work that are working in a field that runs up against so many kinds of addiction and knowing that like, you have both a legal, but also just like, I don't know, an ethical responsibility to people. And that right alongside the like, super real reparations that you are getting like, as a Cree dealer who's just like, "yeah, please, absolutely. Let's, let's start with \$50,000 tonight and we will, and we'll talk." Like, that, that is a, I don't know, like a really interesting tension that I can't think of other situations that you're sort of up against that like, I have a responsibility to not encourage you to gamble, but also like, let's talk about the history of why so many casinos are on reserves and what it means to have the ability to like, regain money in these particular ways.

Emily:

So Alberta and the Edmonton area in general has the most casinos per capita anywhere in North America outside of Las Vegas. So, and like I noticed that moving here, there's not as many, moving to Vancouver there's not as many casinos. Like, Alberton's love gambling. And I sort of thought about it as like, oil revenues have been less, are they taking less taxation on oil? Ends up being a lot of oil workers that go into reserves. And so it ends up being kind of a way to get money back in that sense. And how it works in Alberta is that casinos that are not on reserves like, the money goes to charitable organizations, but casinos on reserves, it gets put into a pot of money that First Nations in Alberta apply for, for different projects. So some of that money ends up going to my reserve actually. But it's, yeah, it is a really interesting dynamic of sort of like, weird reparations. But 80% of the businesses repeat. So you, like, I hung out with

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some of those people dealing these dudes like, terrible dudes a lot of the time, more than my friends because I saw them like four or five days a week. So even though they're kind of terrible, you end up having a care relationship with them too.

Hannah (Host):

Because they're human and they're there. Right. It struck me just as you were saying that there's a class dynamic to this too, when you think about how many of the people working in the oil industry, or like working class people who have come from elsewhere in Canada and being, been relocated to Alberta because the economies where they're from have been devastated, which is also a, like we do not have world enough in time to also get into like the super fucking complex politics of the oil industry in Alberta. But like, oh boy, is it complicated! And just everyone's getting exploited, really. But the other thing that really strike, like when you talked about like, these people are treating you like garbage and you have to figure out how to handle that because your recourse is like, some dude who doesn't really care, really reminded me of like, one job that I had during my undergrad which was a customer support center for a prominent, for Rogers wireless. I was about to be like, like vague about it, but like fuck it, it was for Rogers. I worked for Rogers at one of their phone centers. And the way that you get treated like, when you are in a customer service position, particularly I think the distance of the phone amplified that. It was also like, the people who would treat you the worst were the people who spent the most money with the company, and so you know, whoever feels like they have bought the ability to dehumanize you via spending a lot of money. But we had these phones that we would use to sort of log in and out of our shifts. And you were evaluated on the accuracy of like, is your 20 minute break actually 20 minutes. And they can tell because you're like, logging in and out of your phone. But there was a, so there are a couple of buttons that were like an "I need to take a break outside of my allotted break time" button that like makes them stop sending calls through to you. And one of them was to go in and bathroom break, but there was a separate button for an emotional leave because they recognize that people are treating you like garbage and sometimes you need to go and cry. And that was just a built in part of the job. Like, "oh yeah, yeah, for sure. A man's gonna yell at you at some point. And so here's the go cry for five minutes" button. Which is so fucked up that these industries just, they're like, "yeah, that's just how, that's just how it works. Have a button." Okay. So let's get back to poker, and I would like you to tell me a little bit more about playing in tournaments. Like what that is like. What is involved in that?

Emily:

For a tournament? I like to play tournaments because you pay 30 or \$40 to play and then when you get knocked out you're done. If you're playing a cash game, you buy your chips and you could be like, tempted to keep playing, right? So your money can go really quickly. So I like playing tournaments for that reason. Mostly because I'm cheap and I just observed so many people have gambling addictions that when I go to the casino I'm like, I'm going to spend \$40 or lay that out for myself. So I played some tournaments here in Vancouver. They're actually pretty expensive to play tournaments here more than Edmonton. And then a bunch of the bros I was in grad school with me would drive down to

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Washington state and play at Tulalip, which was interesting. And so, yeah I did have some bros, the Cree bros. Mostly Cree bros. And then so when you play a tournament you buy in for a certain amount of money and then whenever you get knocked out you're out. So maybe you start with like eight tables and then it continues on, continues on. I never get to the final table at these tournaments, but so I'm not playing to win the tournament. If I'm playing a house game, I'll like, play to win. But tournament is just like, oh, I'm just using it as entertainment, like as if I was going to a movie or something like that.

Hannah (Host): So what's the difference for you between playing for fun and playing to win? Like what are you doing when you're playing to win?

Emily: Because I guess when I play house games in the last little bit, I like, I kind of, I do want to start like a new game in Vancouver that would be like, mostly women and queers because it would be such a different space. But I like, when I play, play house games I usually know the people, so I know their weaknesses or whatever.

Hannah (Host): [Laughs]

Emily: And I, in terms of like, what they do. You are like, playing off people's weaknesses. You get to know them like, oh. And I think it like, relates to how people deal with conflict or like, their lives in general. They're like, "oh, I'm gonna, I'm gonna go all in." And I think that like the go all in as I've seen it as kind of a masculine move too, that people are like, I have nothing. And they still going all in. Whereas like, I feel like women are more calculated in the way they play poker. They're like, "okay, well I have this and I'm going to do this reasonable thing. Like I'm not going to just do this like egotistical move." I see that a lot of the time, which is fun when you do it as a woman and people don't expect. You're like, "ha, I had nothing! I was just bluffing you." Yeah, I guess I just don't expect to win in tournaments because there's so many people and people are so good. Yeah. And casinos, like even now playing a tournament, I get like a little nervous to sit down at a table because it's so the, the way that people deal is so fast. Like you have to watch and like know your cards well. So I think it's like, better to learn at home games and then go into the casino. But I think you get a lot better quicker. It's like. like snowboarding and the prairies, like on like at Snow Valley and like, very flat, whereas going into the casino, like you get thrown in and you have to. you have to figure it out. Yeah.

Hannah (Host): I really like the turn of phrase, "It's like snowboarding in the prairies." I'm so going to use that. Oh, it you just hit sort of like metaphorically my preference for the prairie. Sorry, Vancouver. It's like I really like cross country skiing, but downhill anything, is just horrifying to me. Don't, not interested. Not interested in going downhill. Yeah, so the, the, I really, really love this image of like playing poker, cognizant of the gendered ways in which people are judging the choices you're gonna make and in which people are making their own choices, and figuring out like how to play that off against people like, which strikes me as a particular survival skill that like, a lot of women develop. As a sort of an ability to

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understand the ways in which people are judging you, and usually underestimating you and knowing how to use that to be like, "cool, cool, cool, cool. I'm just gonna—" this is my own version of leaning in— "I'm just going to lean into that so I can get what I need to out of this situation." Which I wonder if there's like, do you think that there's anything about sort of that skillset that, that then can be expanded outside of the poker table like, or is there something you can learn from that, that interaction that that is a tool you can bring elsewhere in your life?

Emily:

I think like, walking into a poker tournament and being the only woman in the space is like, like is the same feeling as walking into like a seminar or a meeting or all these things where you're the only woman too, and where like, your skills are going to be underestimated and also there's more eyes on you. So yeah, I think it definitely comes back to a, definitely it comes back to like all sorts of spaces I'm in. Although I'm in spaces with lots of women now in my life, which is nice, at work in different spaces. But yeah, I think it definitely relates to that. And it's also like in the, when you're playing poker there's a blind that tells you like, what the mandatory bet is, and that keeps raising because otherwise people would play the game forever with these low bets. So the stakes get higher as you move further on into the game. So I really noticed that like, at the beginning of the game when people don't, don't know how you're going to play is also when there's the least risk in terms of like, getting out and buying back in because you could just like put all, all in, all in. And then when you buy in the blind isn't super high. Does that makes sense to you? So like, you can still meet the mandatory bet. If you buy it in later you might only have one hand so you have to win the one hand. So yeah, I definitely noticed like, in home games with dealers at four in the morning when everyone's like, intoxicated and also very tired, which is definitely a different, like, less like the games that I play here, it was like grad school bros, we'd have like sandwich meats and are like nice, like, like arty beer and all this stuff. And then these other games with dealers would be like very different at four in the morning. Like and sort of more cutthroat that, that people would just like, particularly men, like go all in first few hands just to try and double up their hand and then, and see how it works, so they get knocked out. So yeah, I think like women in general are, I see in my life like have to be, have to be more calculated and less reckless. And so I think poker can be fun that you can like learn to be like, "oh I'm just going to go well and, or be, be a little bit more reckless" and gregarious and like confident in yourself too.

Hannah (Host):

Love that idea of like a space where you're allowed to be reckless, like in a way that it's just so very just really actually dangerous in the, in the real world, quote unquote. So like spaces of permissible recklessness are very exciting. And because I am a nerd, the comparison I keep making in my head is the fact that a year and a half ago when I moved to Vancouver, I started playing *Dungeons and Dragons*, which is also something I played, I played a couple of sort of one off or short session RPGs in my past, but for the most part, like getting into something like *Dungeons and Dragons* felt just like it's for dudes, and they all already know the rules. And the rules are so fucking complicated and if you don't understand the rules you're going to get laughed out. And, and there's the sort of

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stereotype of the *D&D* game that just feels like a place you don't want to be when you are a woman, particularly when you're like, a pissed off feminist woman, which is my primary gender: pissed off feminist. But there is something about that game which is all about a space for recklessness, and so who gets to participate in those activities where it's like a little bit outside of reality and you just get to like, do dumb shit and a good time without much concern for the consequences. Like, and why are those activities dominated by men and women don't get as much access to them? And my way in was a *D&D* group that was all women and queers and that all of a sudden I found a version of the game that I was allowed to play and that isn't like a bunch of assholes like hitting on bar wenches and/or shaming me for needing you to like, re-explained for the 14th time how charisma works. Everybody was like, oh, you're allowed to play this into your allowed to have fun and are allowed to do like really dumb shit in this space of this game. And that has felt incredibly liberating for me like, finally being able to participate in something like that.

Emily: I've never played *Dungeons and Dragons* ever. It's something my sister is into. It looks really cool, but I just don't understand it at all. And you can have a different personality when you play those games and poker too, like that's the sort of part of recklessness or escape that you don't totally have to be yourself. Like, I don't have to carry any of my baggage into this poker table. I can just like, think what my strategy is and be totally different person. Yeah, I think that's funny. That's true. Like, there's no spaces for recklessness for women usually. Like, yeah. But there's also like, I don't know why people are nervous to make, like I do know why people are nervous to make mistakes in those spaces, but like, the worst thing is that like, I get shamed at a casino that I didn't know the rules which like, will feel shitty and then I'll lose \$30, which isn't the end of the like, it's not real life, like not quite real life. Yeah. So I, I, yeah, I just like, I was super nervous to play with like, my friend who was with other dealers who all knew all the rules, whose eyes were on and who probably had crushes on a bunch of people at the table from coworkers and so like, very nervous. But thinking back, I was like, why was I nervous anyways? Like I, I trust all these people and like, we're just having fun and if I fuck up, that's fine. I don't, yeah. I wish we were more okay with fucking up.

Hannah (Host): Oh gosh, me too. Yeah, I mean so much system internalized, right? It's just you have a sense of people watching you and judging you and that sort of you internalize the sense of like, I'm not allowed to make mistakes. I mean this is the question of who's allowed to make mistakes publicly and who isn't is like, such a politicized question. But that like, the freedom that comes from saying like, "I'm just going to try this thing and I'm probably going to fuck up 100 times and that is okay," and my fucking up isn't all of a sudden a condemnation of my entire race or gender. It's just like I an individual did a bad job today like that and that been fine like, is really is really, really liberating. And so sort of bringing it back in my mind to technology which I think is another like, girls are socialized to be afraid, making mistakes and so much of getting comfortable with like, programming and working with computers is about being willing to try it 100 times and fuck up 100 times and have fun, and not have people assume that

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means that you are ill suited to this activity. But that is a thing that I have found in past teaching situations to be really hard to communicate to people, because when you are teaching you're expected to model expertise all the time. And so if you want to model to your students a space in which fucking up is okay, you need to fuck up and have it be okay. You need to not know some things. You need to try a thing and have it not work out. But when you're a woman teacher and you try a thing and it doesn't work out, your teaching evaluations are fucking scathing, like, "not smart enough to be teaching this class." And so it just becomes a self-perpetuating thing where like, I can't show you that it's okay because there are a lot of people who still say it's not okay for me. And figuring out like how do we, how do we start sort of— in whatever these fields are and technology and plain and cards— how do we start to like model to people who have been told it's not okay for them to fuck up that like, "yeah, I no you're super can. Here, make 100 mistakes. You're allowed to. You're still allowed to be here." Yeah. I don't know. Do you want to solve? Do you want to solve that one?

Emily: I don't have the, I don't have the answer. I think like, well there's like, the whole realm of like, professional poker is super different, but I think that you can learn how to be okay with like, fucking up generally in your life by playing poker or like learning new things that you're just really, really bad at, and like, continually bad at it for a long time. I think like we kind of get into grooves of like, oh, I'm like fairly, like not challenging ourselves to, to new things. And I think like, like hobbies can be that. But yeah, fucking up. I think like, the teaching evaluations is like, first time I read my teaching evaluations I was like, "oh my gosh. Like, I'm never doing this again." And like, since I was a TA it doesn't, not really, didn't matter that much. Yeah. Oh my gosh. I don't know. I don't know how students don't realize that like, lots of times professors don't know stuff too, because whenever a professor's like, "well what do you think?" Like, that means they don't have an answer. Like, I don't know why students think that their professors are like these, like characters that know all this stuff, because often when you're writing a seminar paper like you're going to know more about that than the professor and that's okay. Yeah. I don't know. Spaces of common learning.

Hannah (Host): More of those would be amazing. I know. I think students get that impression because professors produce that impression on purpose because people--

Emily: You kind of have to.

Hannah (Host): You kind of have to. But I also think people just get really high on their own authority and superiority. But I love this idea of like, using your hobbies as a space to be okay with fucking up. I have a friend and I were, were messaging recently and she was telling me about how she's gotten really into power lifting because she's super bad at it, and knows absolutely nothing about it and needs their trainer to re-explain how a dead lift works like, five times a session over and over and over again. And she has no natural aptitude for it. I might be underselling her, I'm sure, I'm sure she is very competent. But like, she really

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emphasized this like, "I am bad at this thing" and she is also a professor and she was like, "it is making me a better teacher." The experience of intentionally doing something I'm not good at is making me better at teaching because I'm witnessing the patience and the compassion that is involved in letting people not be good at something and still like, letting them participate in that, and still letting them sort of have space to learn even if that learning happens much more slowly than you would like it to. The other metaphor for teaching that I always, that always strikes me whenever I'm traveling through an airport is you know how mad at you all of the security screening people are because you don't know the rules of that particular airport and like, do I keep my shoes on? Do I take my shoes off? Does my laptop have to go in a separate bin or in the same bin as everything else? Do I, like, cuz it's slightly different at every airport, but they all are so mad because they have to say it 5,000 times a day and so they know it. And it's that like we're, we can be awfully impatient when people don't know the things that we know. But yeah, no, I love, I love the idea of poker as a like, a hobby that teaches you that it's okay to fuck up. Like whatever that hobby is, like finding some space in your life to do a thing that you're not good at and can fuck up at is like, so important, particularly when you are somebody who's like, scared for whatever reason. Scared of, of the prospect of doing something badly in front of people. [Music: "There's Your Trouble" by The Dixie Chicks]

Hannah (Host): If you'd like more from Emily you can follow her on Twitter @emilyjaneriddle, and you should do that because she is very funny and very smart. As always, you can find show notes secretfeministagenda.com. You can follow me on Twitter @hkpmcgregor and tweet about the podcast using the hashtag #secretfeministagenda and in honor of International Women's Day, which was yesterday, you should recommend this podcast and also at least five more women-hosted and produced podcasts, or you'll have 10 years bad luck. Just kidding. Feminism is non-compulsory. 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. Emily's theme song was "There's Your Trouble" by the Dixie Chicks. Let's meet back here in one weeks time for another minisode. This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]