

Episode 2.19 Growing Up

May 25, 2018

Hannah (Host): [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Happy Birthday to me. Guess what? It's my birthday today. By today, I mean Friday, May 25th, which is actually the future as I'm recording this, but you get it. In the present tense, that is Friday morning, I am waking up in Regina, Saskatchewan where, I want to remind you, in two days time on May 27th, I will be at the first ever Secret Feminist Agenda meetup at 7:00 PM at Malty— that's M A L T Y— National Brewing Company. All of the details are on the Facebook event, which I will link in the show notes, and you should all come, and you should all bring me birthday presents. Now all this attention to my birthday and it's importance is not simply my Leo rising speaking, but it's actually really pertinent to this week's secret feminist agenda. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

That's right. I'm going to talk about getting older...or growing up? "Growing up" sounds like a thing that a child says. And I think you're done growing up when you're a grownup, so I guess it's just aging now. It's hard to say. What are words? But what I'd like to do today is think a little bit about this weird fraught, politicized, gendered business of aging. And I want to think about it in three different ways. Oh, that's right. It's a tripartite minisode. The three parts are going to be short. Don't worry. So part the first. What does aging look like when you aren't living a conventional life? Ugh, "conventional." That's such a loaded term. But I was googling around in preparation for this episode, because that's how serious scholars look things up, and I came across an article that claimed that 34 is the happiest year of your life and I thought that is great news. I'm delighted to hear it. And I sort of assumed it would be some like, you know, in your twenties you aren't sure who you are. And then in your early thirties you're worried about being in your thirties now, but by 34 you've settled into it and you're really starting to figure your shit out. And I was super ready to be all on board with that. And then I clicked on the article and it was like, "34 is the happiest year of your life because it's when you get married and have babies." I was like, whoops, nevermind. Cause I'm certainly not getting married at 34, and unless I make some significant medical interventions in the next three months, I'm also not having a baby at 34. So all of leads to the question of how exactly one charts the business of growing up slash getting older when you've hit an age where your just not necessarily matching up with the life choices of those around you.

Now, I was lucky, I spent my twenties with a lot of communities who are doing things if not exactly the same as me, then similar to me. I know that other people growing up in different communities experience this sort of "shit, everybody's getting married and having babies" thing in their twenties. That just wasn't as much the case for me. Part of it was because I started university a little bit later and then I went to grad school. Most of my close friends, even

from high school and undergrad also went on to grad school, and that just has a way of kind of pushing some major dates back a little bit in your life. There is also just a sort of, in my family, a tendency for the women to get married and have kids older as well. And so there wasn't a ton of pressure coming at me from my family for those kinds of things either. And so I really did get to spend my twenties, you know, being a student, and traveling, and fucking around, and surrounded by a lot of people who are doing similar kinds of things. And the fact that I wasn't settling into a longterm relationship, or starting to think about kids, or buying a home just wasn't a big deal because most of the people around me weren't doing it either. And that has changed for me in my thirties. In my thirties people around me are absolutely buying houses, getting married, having kids. Not necessarily in that order and not necessarily all three, but increasingly sort of quote unquote "settling down" in what we might call conventional ways even while they're obviously not conventional people. But there is undeniably a way in which you know, not following normalized and socially sanctioned scripts for what your life should look like, can feel lonely, it can feel disorienting, it can feel confusing, it can feel anxiety inducing. These are all affects that I have experienced in relation to not doin' my thirties right, so to speak. And interestingly, so on Twitter, I asked people to send me some of their favorite pieces about growing up, getting older, et cetera. And this was a really common theme in what people sent me, was this sort of this, this anxiety about not growing up correctly.

So Larysa Hufflepuff sent the *Hyperbole and a Half* piece "This is Why I'll Never Be an Adult," which is sort of about the, the normative vision of what adulthood looks like. Which is all schedules and day planners, and cooking from home, and answering all of your email, and going to the bank, and cleaning things, and how...I mean essentially what this piece is talking about is how incredibly hard it is to fulfill those normative images of what adulthood is like when you have mental health challenges. If you have anxiety, or depression, or ADHD, or any number of things that kind of adulthood of like, "yes, and every day I am going to wake up in the morning and I'm going to make a smoothie and then I'm going to just do a quick vacuum and then I will go for a jog and then I will go to work and the..." like, that's already. I just need to lie down after just listing that imagined morning. Where did you schedule the hour of reading Twitter and weeping? I don't understand. Yeah. So there's that great piece.

Control_abandoned, or Sarah sent in a really great piece called "Facing the Future Without a Map" from a website called *The Asexual Agenda* that is specifically about sort of grappling with what your future will look like when you are queer and asexual. And it has this really great paragraph that I would like to read to you where the writer says, "I don't know what the future holds. I don't know what life will be like for me in 5 years. I don't know what will happen as I get older. I don't know what it will be like being a queer ace post-doc or a queer ace professor instead of a queer ace grad student. I don't know how I'll navigate this international snarl of heteronormativity. But I know where I am right now. I know who I am right now. I know what I want right now. Maybe that's enough. Maybe that's a start." That is very lovely and also gave me an acute moment of

"Holy shit. You know what you want right now? How did you figure it out and can you tell me?" Because for me, that has been kind of a crux, kind of a thing over the past two years. Part of what made my twenties work was that I knew exactly what I was doing the whole time, and what I was doing was just getting degrees. It just got three degrees and then I did a postdoc and then I was on the job market and there was this way in which my education and then my career just structured my life, and I'm not going to say that wasn't complicated at times, but also had to kind of simplicity to it. I knew what I was supposed to be doing. I knew what I was supposed to want at any given moment. And what I was supposed to want was a tenure track job, and so I did want it very, very badly. And then I got it, and I moved to Vancouver, and I immediately said to myself, "well, what the fuck do I do now?" Because what do you do when you checked off whatever boxes you drew for yourself? I mean, I guess the answer is "come up with some more things to do," but I don't know what those should be. And the challenge of not knowing what those should be, in part, comes from the freedom of living an unstructured life. That's, you know, the, the terror that comes from the openness of possibilities, which is to say that I don't feel obliged to buy a house in the suburbs, or get married, or have children. That isn't to say that I won't ever do any of those things, but they don't feel like necessities to me, and that is really freeing, and it is also really baffling because it's hard to imagine then what the next phase of my life will look like.

A thing that I have found very empowering and very joyful is to be friends with queers who are a little bit older than me, and to see the rich and fabulous ways that they are living lives that, again, sort of don't look the way we were told adulthood had to look. Who have created families that don't look the way we were told families had to look. And I'm always on the lookout for more models of, of exciting life possibilities. But I'm not gonna lie, there are times when this whole "living an unconventional life" thing just, just makes me feel lonely and also makes me feel afraid of being left behind. This has got me thinking about a piece that I wrote right when I had first moved to Vancouver called "The Loneliness of the Spinster." And in it I was thinking in particular of what it means to relocate for an academic job when you are unattached, so childless and single. And I try to embrace the word "spinster." I like the word "spinster" and I like the word spinster particularly because I really love a 2015 article by Briallen Hopper called "On Spinsters," in which she thinks about the history of the spinster as a figure. And she described spinsters as follows. She says, "spinsters are often weird, difficult, dissonant, queer, like an unnerving dream or a pungent dose of smelling salts." That's great. I would love to be like a pungent dose of smelling salts. That's fabulous. And what she does is, is historicize and give some context for the fact that there have always been women who have lived unattached lives, or nontraditional lives, or unconventional lives, lives that are not structured by marriage or by having children. And that the spinster is really powerful figure because she threatens the sort of dominance of reproductive norms and the sense that only one particular life is available for women, and that outside of that life we must somehow be unfulfilled. Which is all very exciting and very motivating, and then sometimes as I'm sitting at home on a Friday night watching Netflix, I think I'm not convinced that I'm living up to

that particular goal of radically threatening the dominant norms through my subversive nontraditional lifestyle. But, you know, heck, I'll put that on my to do list for 34, threatened the dominant norm somehow. Let's all put that on my own to do list. That sounds pretty good.

Alright. Part of the second, what does getting older look like physically? So part of the motivation behind making this episode was actually the fact that just a couple of weeks ago I made the decision to chop all of my hair off. That's fairly common for me. And also to dye it purple, which is less common. No, I've also had purple hair before. Anyway, and I had, I absolutely had a moment at the salon of saying "yes, I would like to chop my hair off and dye it purple. And yes also, I am turning 34. Am I too old for this?" And that is, of course, absurd because one can chop their hair off and dye it purple at absolutely any age. But there is certainly always in the back of my head a sense of the expectations, but what increased maturity will look like in terms of the aesthetic decisions that I make. And this has me thinking about a great article by Stacy London of *What Not To Wear* fame. Sarah Wingo sent this to me in that same Twitter thread, though this one I had, in fact, read before. And in it she's thinking about getting older, and how her style has changed, and again, what it means to not be a conventional grownup. She thinks about stigma against aging in North American society and she sort of brings together this question of charting an unconventional adulthood that doesn't follow a particular set of social rules with also charting for yourself what your adult aesthetic is going to be. Again, in a way that doesn't follow a set of rules about, you know, what in her case, a 47 year old woman wears, because if you're not living your life conventionally, you don't have to dress conventionally. And actually also if you are living your life conventionally, you still don't have to dress conventionally. So there you go. But I've absolutely thinking about this, but the transformation of aesthetic over time when I make decisions like dye my hair purple, or getting another tattoo, or you know, the kinds of clothes that I'm going to buy, and why, and what that has to do with my shifting relationship to my body. I know this is a thing, shifting relationships to our bodies, that a lot of women in particular grapple with as we get older. I think that's, you know, a pretty, a pretty familiar stereotype, the turning 30 freak out. And I've got to say that, for a variety of reasons, it's not, that particular anxiety is not one I have experienced much. Don't worry about it. I've got more than enough other anxieties to make up for it. But growing up as a fat person, I had to get used pretty early on the idea that I couldn't hinge a lot of my sense of value on what people thought of me because that way lay deep misery. But I know, I have a lot of women in my life who have for better, for worse, hinged some sense of their value on being attractive, and on the kinds of attention and praise and opportunities that come with that, and I know as we're all getting older that that's a thing that women are having to grapple with. Sort of, what to do when inevitably age complicates or transforms your social positioning, and it will complicate and transform mine as well. That isn't less the case for me, but I, but I do think that I feel less anxiety about it than, than other people that I've talked to. But what I do feel is a sort of a sense that my body is calling upon me to relate to it differently as I grow older. My body asks for me now a different kind of relationship. It is asking for me to listen a little bit better.

And it is asking me to be a little bit gentler with it. And it's telling me that maybe our project this decade should be sustainability, perhaps. That means all kinds of things. You know, it means my body wants different kinds of movement that wanted when I was younger. It means that, you know, my skin really appreciates me taking some time in the evening for an elaborate Korean skincare regime in a way that, God damn, when I was 18 who even knows what garbage I was using, but it looked fucking luminous. Outrageous. You, it means that my body really appreciate it if I would drink the appropriate amount of water every day and just maybe skip the wine some nights. And yeah, there's a way of thinking about that as the sort of miserable crumbling body that we all increasingly have as we grow older. But there's also a way of thinking of it as, you know, an opportunity for a different relationship to our embodiment. And that's a thing that I'm trying really hard to sit with and to, to be less frustrated that, you know, it's, it's harder to take care of my bum right knee, and it requires more attention to feel good, and it's not always possible to feel good. God. It's not a, it's never always possible for anybody to feel good, you know this. But the slowing down feels right for me in its own way. Sort of slowing down and listening. Not slowing down and not doing things. But I, I do think that that sense of sort of being interested in and attentive to my body as it grows older ties into part the third of this minisode.

And part the third is about what it looks like to get older when you have a dead parent. So this year I turn 34 and my mother died when she was 44, which once upon a time felt pretty old and now the, the closer I get to that age, the younger it seems. And now that I am within a decade of it, I, I feel like I have a real sense of, of how soon 44 is in lots of ways and how, yeah, just how young that was, how early that was. There's this interesting way in which, as I continue to grow up and get further away from the time in my life when I actually knew her, I'm also at the same time getting closer and closer to the age she was when I knew her. You know, when she was 34, I was six. You know, I'm starting to get into the ages that she was, that I remember her at, and for all that I feel further away from her. I also feel, oddly like I'm growing closer to her, as I get closer to her age, that I'm kind of catching up with her in this weird way. And that makes growing up and growing older feel like a real gift. Hitting 44 now feels like, I mean hitting 45 feels like it will, it will be, I don't know, like miraculous, like it's an age past which I don't know how to chart. So everybody just keep it together because I need the world to last for another decade, okay? I have, I have another task to accomplish. And that relation, that sense of moving into that part of my life as something that feels like a gift, and something that, that I'm excited to do again, sort of, sort of complicates and shifts my relationship to aging. You know, I've been thinking about tattoos and about the fact that I've been getting more and more tattoos as I got older. And how much tattoos are this remarkable way of documenting where you are in a particular place and time. They say something about your taste, and your aesthetic, and your priorities. And also they say something about what shape your body was at a moment, and what kind of clothes you like to wear. They record the history of you right there under your skin. And then you bring that forward with you into a body that is transforming over time so that your past is there, but it's not stuck

in the past, it comes forward with you into the present. And that that idea of, of marking our bodies, and territorializing them, and, you know, making them our own in a world that in all kinds of ways is constantly trying to make our body's not our own. It's constantly trying to make our bodies public property or social goods that feels so significant and so important to me. And it also feels like a way of honoring our body's movements through time. And I realize now as I'm saying all this, that I'm basically paraphrasing the Ani DiFranco lyric "I've got highways for stretchmarks/See where I've grown." So let's just say I listened to a lot of Ani DiFranco when I was young and it has permanently marked, just like tattoos and also my stretch marks. So there you go. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans"] So those are my shambling thoughts about this particular birthday, and about the messy and complicated business of growing up. And now, as I grab a slice of birthday cake, let's head over to Kaarina. [Music: "I Will" by Mitski]

Kaarina:

Hello, and welcome to Kaarina's Cozy Self Care Corner. So I feel like I haven't done this segment in about 10 years because that's how long May have felt. A while ago I asked you about anticapitalist self care based on some interesting writing out there about how self care is inaccessible because it is often focused on consumption, or how consumption-based self care can come at the expense of others, especially those who are exploited under capitalism. So I asked for your suggestions on what anticapitalist self care might look like. And thank you so much to those of you who got in touch with me. So generous to share your time and your thoughts. So I have a kind of round up of what anti capitalist self care might look like. And I'm looking forward to hearing more or hearing criticisms of what I'm bringing to the podcasting table today. First, some forms of anticapitalist self care that are really important to my life. Number one, going to public libraries. I grew up going to libraries all the time whenever I could. Whether I was in Calgary where I grew up, or in Toronto visiting my family, we would go to the library on a weekly, if not daily basis. Going to the library is still something that I do with my partner all the time, or on my own. In fact, yesterday we were both having a bad day and we both ended up at the library separately and we got to hang out together at the library which was not what either of us had planned. But I find that libraries can be a place to be around other people but still have some solitude without being totally isolated or lonely. So I use it to combat some kind of, like, some of the isolation that comes from academic work. They can be an adventure without having to spend any money. There are a lot of activities to do at the library. There are also just places to sit and be quiet. There are things to learn. There's entertainment. It has a lot to offer, so I always advocate going to the library. Even if you don't have a library card, get a library card. I understand sometimes library cards cost money. Number two on my anticapitalist self care list is spend money at businesses that are meaningful to me. So if I do want to practice consumption based self care, I really like it when I get to give money to people I care about or people in my community. So I'm really lucky to have a cafe bakery right next to the place where I work that is owned by friends of mine, and being able to go and spend money there on treats for myself is the best form of self care I can think of because I see the people who get that money and profit off of it and I care

about them a lot and they care about me. That doesn't mean like, buy into all of your friends multi level marketing schemes that they peddle on Facebook, but if you want to spend money and you can spend money in your community, that's awesome. Number three on the anticapitalist self care list comes from a listener Hannah, who got in touch with me. And Hannah shared their self care practice, and it actually really resonated me and made me realize that I've also been practicing this. So, so Hannah McGregor has spoken on this podcast about productivity, and how it structures our lives, and how we value ourselves, and how there's important ways to resist that and to let ourselves be unproductive, and how that can be a form of feminism. Thinking on that, Hannah, our listener, wrote to me about how they practice Sabbath. Hannah wrote that their practice of Sabbath derives from their faith life, but they don't think you need to belong to a religious tradition to practice a day of rest like this. So Hannah talks about having one day off a week free from expectations and the guilt that comes from not following through on them, not trying to set yourself "must do" tasks and giving yourself a free pass to do what your brain and body want. So after reading this email from Hannah, I was like, "Hey, I do that. I don't call it a day of rest or Sabbath, but I do it." So when I started my masters, one of my friends told me that he took every Friday off from academic work and I was like, "wait a minute, you're allowed to do that?" And so I started taking every Saturday off and then every Sunday off. Then I just didn't work on weekends at all, which I love. And even now when I'm teaching a lot in a very short period, I don't really do teaching work on weekends if I can help it. I do other work, housework, derby work. And having one day where you wake up and you don't make a to do list or set yourself a set of tasks or expectations, and then you don't feel all day like you're procrastinating and you don't feel guilty, and you just get to sink into that rest, and it feels so good. It's really fulfilling. And it's amazing how setting yourself the expectation of relaxation rather than productivity can have such an impact on the way that you experience your day. And Hannah's email reminded me of an episode of *Death, Sex, and Money* where guest, Ellen Bernstein describes what she calls her "shouldless days," so days when you should do nothing and you just do what you want. And I love that. Hannah, in their email pointed out that this is not an accessible form of self care, especially for people who have to work a lot, but also that no form of self care is going to be accessible for everyone. So continuing to have conversations about self care, and what it looks like for you, and with the limitations of that might be, and why it's so important, and why we need to build a world where it is important and not out of reach is really important. Just saying the word "important" over and over. So thank you so much for your feedback, and hope you have a great weekend. And maybe you don't do anything, or maybe you don't tell yourself that you're going to do anything. So enjoy that. Bye. [Music: "I Will" by Mitski]

Hannah (Host):

As always, you can find show notes and all the episodes of *Secret Feminist Agenda* on secretfeministagenda.com. You can follow me on Twitter @hkpmcgregor. You can follow Kaarina @ kaarinasaurus and you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag #secretfeministagenda. Also, you can and should rate and review the show. It would be like a really great birthday present. The podcast's theme song is "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans off their

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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, 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].