

Secret Feminist Agenda, Season 4

Andi Schwartz and Morgan Bimm

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Secret Feminist Agenda, Season 4

Website: <https://secretfeministagenda.com/category/podcast/page/3/>

The *Secret Feminist Agenda* podcast was first encountered by then-graduate student Andi Schwartz as assigned ‘reading’ in a Queer Pedagogies seminar. The seminar was part of a student-run initiative facilitated by co-reviewer, Morgan Bimm, who started the seminar series as a critical response to a lack of teaching resources available to graduate students. The podcast’s aims and sensibilities spoke to our experiences and values both then, as first-generation university students and now, as emerging feminist media scholars.

Secret Feminist Agenda is recorded and produced by Dr. Hannah McGregor, an Assistant Professor of publishing at Simon Fraser University. *Secret Feminist Agenda* is McGregor’s second podcast, which she began in 2017 with the aim of bridging academia and feminism and forging connections between feminists.¹ In addition to producing the *Secret Feminist Agenda* podcast, podcasting has become an integral part of McGregor’s pedagogy² and research; she co-founded the SSHRC-funded Amplify Podcast Network to develop guidelines for peer reviewing podcasts. The original goals of the podcast, bridging academia and feminism and forging connects with feminists, remain the driving force behind season four, which is further organized around the principle of “keeping it local.”

Season four consists of 30 episodes, half of which offer long-form interviews with feminists in academia, art, sex therapy, podcasting, Canadian literature, comedy, and more, which effectively highlight the various forms that feminism can take and offer a window into feminist friendships and community. While the theme “keeping it local” was challenged by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (interviews could no longer be conducted in person), the podcast consistently succeeded in prompting listeners to think about space and place as they relate to feminism and community.

In our review, we were struck by the following three themes: 1) critiquing the expert(ise); 2) the spaces and places of feminist thought; and 3) the politics and affects of community space.

- 1) In form, the scholarly podcast acts as a critique of the existing structures of academia. Through interviews with feminists like Dawn Serra and Khairani Barokka, the notion of expertise is critiqued alongside academia’s role in perpetuating myths of excellence through citational and syllabi-building practices. Such critiques highlight the importance of DIY media, like podcasts, as spaces through which expertise can be critiqued and other points of view are circulated. Solo-recorded “minisodes” often engage with more personal

1 McGregor started her first podcast, *Witch, Please*, as a collaboration with her friend and former colleague, Marcelle Kosman, in 2015.

2 In a review of season two of SFA, Anna Poletti suggests that the work done through the podcast is more akin to teaching than research (Poletti, 2019).

- or affective topics; though we debated the merits of these episodes, we came to the conclusion that introducing affect and the personal into scholarship is both an important feminist project and a vital challenge to existing ideas about academic rigour.³
- 2) Through interviews with feminists across fields, including sex therapy (Episode 4.2), comedy (Episode 4.6), podcasting (Episode 4.8), and art (Episode 4.4), the podcast demonstrates the many places and spaces in which feminist thought is fostered; indeed, that feminist thought and critique does not belong solely to the academy. The complexities of public intellectualism or public feminism are compellingly discussed in Episode 4.7: Trans Rights are Human Rights through the lens of cancelled and protested “gender identity debates” scheduled for public spaces across Canada. Campaigns to cancel these events are framed by some as an attack on ‘free speech’ and thus, perhaps, an attack on healthy public intellectual exchange, but these activist efforts are themselves an example of public modes of feminist thought. This and other discussions throughout season four of *Secret Feminist Agenda* highlight the multiple spaces of feminist thought and the multiple complexities of thinking feminism in public.
 - 3) In the spirit of “keeping it local,” season four offers rich discussions of the politics and affects of community space. A favourite example is episode 4.14 with Hilary Atleo of Iron Dog Books in Vancouver, which explores the connection between small business and housing costs as well as the power of systems to foster or destroy community and communal affinities. Episode 4.15, a minisode about World Obesity Day, further demonstrates the malleability of (virtual) space via political intervention, and how the political occupation of space can foster solidarities and positive, communal feelings. The COVID-19 pandemic hit Canada midway through the season, around episode 4.16 with Kai Cheng Thom, whose work frequently engages with notions of disposability, accountability, and harm within queer communities. The intersection of Thom’s work and COVID-19 serves as an acute reminder of both the affective and material significance of community, and the potential devastation of losing it.

In addition to these themes, the podcast incites interesting questions about the feminist and scholarly potential of the podcasting form. McGregor and colleagues have developed podcast peer review guidelines as a mechanism for folding podcasts into the institutional understanding of rigour, and we further understand *Secret Feminist Agenda* as rigorous in its feminist politics of accessibility and the feminist practice of critique. Podcasts can be understood as a feminist

³ In a review of season two of SFA, Carla Rice noted that the minisodes are where the podcast “shines,” writing with admiration of McGregor’s ability to address these more affective topics from both a personal and “big picture” perspective (Rice, 2019).

medium in that they often feature grassroots and DIY production, have a wider reach than more sanctioned forms of scholarship, and have the capacity to bolster women's, feminized, and otherwise marginalized voices. The feminist and scholastic merits of podcasting were explicitly discussed in episode 4.20 with Stacey Copeland and minisode 4.21, "Introducing the Amplify Podcast Network." As Copeland and McGregor discuss, women's voices have long been interpreted as unintelligent and unauthoritative. Podcasting, with its grassroots and DIY sensibilities, has the potential to instill confidence in women, feminized and otherwise marginalized folks through building a practice of speaking; McGregor notes how podcasting has bolstered her own confidence in both academic and non-academic spaces.⁴

Oriented toward low theory and feminist media scholarship, we are perhaps already primed to welcome podcasts into the scholarly fold. In our view, *Secret Feminist Agenda* is exemplary of the benefits wrought by bridging traditional academic knowledges with low theory, community, and collaborative practices. It is our hope that, as academia becomes better acquainted with podcasts, they retain their radical potential, rather than become another research output taxing already overburdened academics.

Reviewed by Andi Schwartz and Morgan Bimm

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⁴ Similar arguments have been made by podcaster-academics, Raechel Tiffe and Melody Hoffman, who hosted the podcast, *Feminist Killjoys*, *PhD*, among others (Tiffe & Hoffman, 2017).

Engaged Scholar Journal Podcast Transcript

Secret Feminist Agenda, Season Four

Podcast review by

Andi Schwartz [A] & Morgan Bimm [M]

00:00:00 [INTRO MUSIC: DONKEY KONG BY MOM JEANS]

00:00:08 A Hello, hello, hello! And welcome to the reviews section of a special issue of the *Engaged Scholar Journal* on “Engaging Feminism: Challenging Exceptionalist Imaginaries.” My name is Andi Schwartz, and my colleague Morgan Bimm and I will be reviewing season four of Hannah McGregor’s podcast *Secret Feminist Agenda*.

00:00:28 [TRANSITION MUSIC]

00:00:32 A I was particularly excited to be invited to review this project, because my research to date has been focused on femme internet culture. And I basically argued throughout my dissertation that memes and selfies are forms of femme theorizing. My undergraduate degree is in journalism from Carleton University, and I was a freelance journalist and writer before starting my graduate studies. So disseminating my research and my other scholarly ideas to a more general or a wider, non-academic audience has always been part of my practice. I’ve published bits of my scholarship in Canadian publications *Xtra*, *Herizons*, and *Flare*. I also write a zine series called *Soft Femme* that is all about femme theory. And I run an academic Instagram account called @acafemmeic. So I am very excited to be reviewing a podcast in a scholarly journal. So excited that I had to invite my frequent collaborator Morgan Bimm to help me, because she actually introduced me to the *Secret Feminist Agenda* podcast when she assigned it to me in her queer pedagogies seminar series back in—what was that? 2019? So hello Morgan, and thank you for joining me for this review. Would you introduce yourself and some of the many hats you’ll be wearing for this review?

00:01:51 M Absolutely. Hi Andi. I love how we’re pretending like we never talk, when really we talk all the time. And this is just, you know, a continuation of many of the conversations that we already have. Yeah. So as Andi has explained, we are pals and frequent collaborators. We met in the Gender, Feminist, and Women Studies PhD program at York University here in Toronto. And my research, like Andi’s, is kind of preoccupied with this idea of what it means to think about cultural production in a way that privileges spaces of low culture and DIY cultures

in addition to the more kind of traditional modes of cultural production that are taken up and kind of valorized by the university. So my own research—my dissertation project looks at the cultural mainstreaming of 2000s indie rock, and I study TV, film, and early internet cultures of the era. And then as Andi mentioned, I've also been involved in some organizing and some programming in the department putting together this kind of scrappy, DIY, queer pedagogies collective that offers workshops and seminars to graduate students and early career faculty across the university, as well as an accessible, one-day conference with another colleague of ours, Margeaux Feldman. So yeah. Super stoked to be here. Super stoked to be talking about *Secret Feminist Agenda*. I've been a long-time podcast lover, and *Secret Feminist Agenda* was actually one of the podcasts that originally got me really excited about pods as a form of media and a form of feminist conversation.

00:03:29 A I was wondering if like, before we get into the conversation about the themes of this season four, if you wanted to give us a little overview of what the podcast is all about?

00:03:32 M For those of you who are familiar with Hannah McGregor's work, or who are *Secret Feminist Agenda* listeners—it's not her first podcast. She originally started *Witch, Please*, which is a feminist Harry Potter rewatch pod with her colleague and pal Marcelle Kosman when they were both based in Edmonton. And then *Secret Feminist Agenda* is kind of her second podcast project that she began as she kind of left postdoc world and entered into her position as a full-time faculty at Simon Fraser University. Both podcast projects, but *Secret Feminist Agenda* in particular, are kind of invested in recreating the best parts of academia. I think there's one quote from episode 4.8, so from earlier in the season that we're reviewing today, and they're saying, you know, if *Witch, Please* was about kind of recreating and amplifying the best parts of a graduate seminar, upper years seminar course—getting really nerdy and talking about texts that we really enjoy—*Secret Feminist Agenda* is really about distilling and pulling out the best parts of chatting with a colleague at a conference or kind of approaching somebody after a panel to pick their brain about that one really cool thing that they said. So it's a series of conversations, but it's also a series of conversations that's really interested in illuminating and getting really excited about different aspects of feminist life—to borrow from Sara Ahmed, right?—and activism and academia and kind of academia-adjacent ways of moving through the world that we can learn from together.

00:05:15 A Thank you for that overview. So yeah. We're going to be focusing on season four, and so I think we'll just kind of dive into some of the themes that we pulled out in our review. The first one that I wanted to highlight is one I'm calling critiquing the expert, or the notion of expertise. You know, in the project of low theory and public scholarship, I think that this is a really important theme. There are some really specific examples, like in episode 4.4 about—it's called "Off Mic Conversations." So there's like this specific critique of Foucault and like can we stop centering Foucault in a conversation about citational practice? And I think in

the same conversation, there's also—they talk about Margaret Atwood and like the role that academic structures play in creating these superstar academics, I guess. So they were kind of saying like, well, if English departments would stop assigning Atwood, maybe we could stop talking about her. [laughs] So I thought that this was a really, really interesting theme. And it showed up in a couple of different ways, like around what is—who is the expert? And I think that this is like a feminist contention, this notion of like “who is the expert?” has been a real question. This kind of conversation really brings into focus the importance of alternative or DIY media like podcasts as one of the ways that we can critique expertise as well as circulate other points of view.

00:06:53 M Yeah! I mean, I think we both agreed that this was a really prominent theme across the pod but in this season in particular. And I think it works in a couple of different ways. As you already alluded to, I think there's this idea of locating expertise and locating knowledge outside of traditional academic structures. And this functions both in like the materiality of the podcast itself and like what that means from a production point of view and a research output point of view, but also the folks that Hannah is talking to and interviewing. I think it also functions in terms of age and seniority. So we have like a couple of really wonderful episodes from this season where Hannah McGregor is interviewing younger scholars, emerging scholars—her RA for the SpokenWeb project at one point, Stacey Copeland. And so I think there's this troubling of the idea that, you know, knowledge can only flow in one direction. And younger scholars are always kind of primed to learn from their mentors and from older folks within the academy—there's that, as well.

00:08:04 A Yeah. I think like this idea shows up in both—and I think it's important to mention in both form and content. So I was talking about citational practice: who are we citing? Who are we assigning? And how do we contribute to creating this expert? But also like, you know, the academy as the only way in which expertise can be produced. One of the minisodes that stood out to me was episode 4.3 on “Enthused.” So I wanted to note this one because in this episode, Hannah McGregor is talking about bringing enthusiasm to her work and how like the kind of idea of a rigorous, prestigious scholar is one that is very serious and unaffected. The critique of that was like bringing in your enthusiasm for your work, and how does that change the shape of academia? So I thought that was also really, really interesting.

00:09:00 M Absolutely. Yeah. I think one of the things that really drew me to Hannah McGregor's work when I discovered her, you know, all those years ago was the joy with which—and the enthusiasm with which she approaches these conversations. A really common refrain on the *Witch, Please* podcast with Marcelle Kosman was, “We're critiquing this thing, or we're talking about this thing, *because* we love it so much.” You know? The notion of critique and joy isn't mutually exclusive, and shouldn't be mutually exclusive. Because it actually makes for much stronger scholarship.

00:09:33 A Yeah. I love that point. And I think that's also like one of the other things I love about this podcast is that it's a way of critiquing expertise but also offering something else. Because I don't think it's that exciting or that helpful, really, to only offer critique. Like I think it's really amazing when people offer critique paired with creation. So that's what I really appreciated about it. And I think that that's like—brings a bit of nuance to that joy and criticism that you were just talking about.

00:10:03 M Yeah. And I think a theme that kind of emerges over the course of this season in particular—you know, it began in summer 2019 and wrapped in late 2020. So it really kind of did encompass the COVID-19 pandemic kind of taking over the collective consciousness. This theme of hope becomes really, really important, particularly later in the season. And I know we'll probably talk about this a bit more, but yeah. Just returning to this idea that these aren't mutually exclusive ideas or affects, you know? We can critique and we can have these scholarly conversations but it's also important to kind of retain hope and joy and connection in the midst of all of that as well.

00:10:47 A Yeah. That's a really, really beautiful sentiment. Because we're kind of already talking about affect, one of the other themes that we had noted we wanted to talk about was the politics and affects of space. So I really appreciated the connection in episode 4.14 with one of the owners of Iron Dog Books about the ways that like physical spaces become community hubs, and the politics and the systems that either enable or disable this. So they were talking about, you know, the act of curation in a book store. Like what politics that are involved in your curation of your inventory can be welcoming or signal the kind of expectations for this space in a way. And so they were talking about small businesses and they were talking about also—you know, in Vancouver, much like here in Toronto—but maybe even more—the cost of housing is like astronomical. And so they were thinking about these two things in relation to each other. Like we are often thinking about the cost of housing, but they also got into the conversation that the cost to small businesses of operating and how these two things go together. So I thought that that was really interesting. So thinking about the politics of the creation of space in this really broad but also interlocking, overlapping way was really interesting.

00:12:13 M Totally. And I think it's really interesting, as well—you know, season four begins very grounded in the physical space, you know? In the first episode, Hannah McGregor is explaining that because she's had a few years to settle into Vancouver, she's really invested in this idea of exploring the local and really exploring those connections to local businesses and activists and other community members. And obviously that's really turned on its head. As the season goes on, COVID-19 arrives on the scene and everything is forced to shift into this much more insular kind of production mode, recording over Zoom and speaking to folks from further away. So again, I think there's this kind of parallel thing at work here where the content of this season—similar themes are reflected in the production and in the materiality of the podcast itself.

00:13:08 A Yeah. I think it was also really interesting—so now we are in calendar year three of COVID-19 as we are recording this episode, or this review. [laughs] So I noted that it was really interesting to be listening to something—I think it was kind of the first time that I was listening back to something that was happening—that was kind of watching the pandemic hit.

00:13:31 M Yeah. Just that dissonance, I guess, between those two spaces—the recording space and the listening space, now, two plus years later—is definitely interesting.

00:13:43 A Yeah. Obviously like recording over Zoom like we're doing now doesn't sound as intimate sometimes. Because you can hear space in between the guest and the host. I think it was really around like episode 4.16, which is a conversation with Kai Cheng Thom, where this shift really happens. And I think that's really interesting, too, to think about loss of community happening because of a pandemic also in relation to a lot of Kai Cheng Thom's work, which is about kind of like disability or—I kind of wanted to avoid using the term 'cancel culture,' because it's just like super loaded. But yeah. I think they talk a lot about accountability, disability, and these kinds of community politics. So it was interesting to think about, I guess—yeah, the kind of scale of loss of community that can happen. So it was kind of a really acute reminder of the importance of community and like our responsibility to community. Is there a way in which we can think about this podcast as an act of creating community or showing responsibility for community?

00:14:58 M Yeah. It's a great question, right? And I think something else that they spend a lot of time chatting about in this particular episode is this idea that there are groups of folks who have been innovating and who have been building community in alternative ways forever. So queer folks and racialized folks, trans folks. And so this idea that—which I think we've all engaged in conversations about this over the last two years—but the idea that the pandemic has really forced us to come face-to-face with the ways in which we can't always rely on institutions and governments and universities to look after us. And so what would it look like to invent alternative or, you know, historically very precedented but still non-traditional ways of reaching out and connecting and folding folks into our spaces and into our communities in a way that is still safe?

00:15:54 A Yeah. I think we'd also had some thoughts about thinking about what it does to take these conversations public and the kind of extra responsibilities that a host takes on in volunteering this scholarship and activism and, you know, just kind of like political discussions in such a public way. I guess I'm thinking about this in relation to the Iron Dog Books episode about like—you do what you can to create a particular space that communicates kind of inherently what the expectations are when you're in this space. But then there were also—I think Hannah mentions at some point the kind of jarring, in a way, experience of realizing that oh, not everyone who listens to this podcast shares the exact same kind of politics. And then

what do you as the host do with that with that information? What responsibility do you have as a podcast host or other kind of public intellectual, I guess, to respond?

00:17:02 M Yeah. There's a way in which—to a certain extent, you know, the responsibility or the accountability of public-facing work is so much different and in some ways so much more than kind of traditional academic publishing avenues. Obviously we're doing this very funny thing of reviewing a scholarly podcast for a scholarly journal via podcast, so we thought it might be worth some time talking about the form itself and sort of what—yeah, what opportunities might be offered here that other media don't.

00:17:38 A Yeah. So I think this really connects to the first theme that we mentioned, this idea of critiquing the expert and creating this space in which this critique can exist. So a lot of the conversations are with academics—many are not, too. But it's a space in which the critiques of the institution can be made because they're not—it's not bound by the structure of being held within the institution. Also in doing that, in like having these conversations with such a wide range of feminist thinkers, the podcast really demonstrates that feminist scholarship, feminist pedagogy, feminist activism happens in like a wide variety of mediums. So that includes sex therapy, comedy, podcasting of course, art, and all other kinds of forms. So it shows, really, that critique does not belong to the academy and like scholarship does not belong to the academy.

00:18:40 M What is kind of uniquely feminist about podcasts and about this scholarly podcast in particular? If we think about podcasts, again, as a form—putting on the media studies scholar hat—yeah, they are in many ways a lot more accessible for folks than taking a class, than stepping into traditional university spaces. And so that question of accessibility and of having conversations and choosing language that is going to be kind of legible to a wider audience I think is a really core tenet and a really core value of the *Secret Feminist Agenda* project as a whole.

00:19:19 A Yeah. I actually really enjoyed—there was a couple of episodes on the podcast about podcasting or like talking to other podcasters—

00:19:26 M Very meta.

00:19:27 A Yeah. [laughs] Very meta. And I think they were some of my favourite episodes. One of the things that really stood out to me was, in the conversation with Stacey Copeland, was the idea of voice and particularly women's voices. And women's voices being interpreted as like not very intelligent-sounding, not very scholarly-sounding, and not very serious-sounding. And this has been taken up by a couple of different people. I thought it was really interesting, Hannah talking about how the practice of doing a podcast like helped to develop

this confidence in her own voice and just a comfort with speaking. Which I think is a very feminist outcome. Which is probably not even planned, but it's something that's happened, I think, through the course of podcasting.

00:20:21 M Totally. I mean, I think whether we're conscious of it or not, right? A lot of us kind of come up through academic and scholarly spaces with this idea that traditionally quote-unquote "male" voices confer authority. There's all sorts of writing on like NPR voice, right? And kind of Ira Glass, and that whole vibe [laughs]. And so I think this idea that *Secret Feminist Agenda* is kind of modelling this type of academic conversation that is not invested in recreating that and is in fact openly critical of that, you know? We're keeping in the laughs, we're keeping in the jokes and the curse words. And alongside all of that, there's this really intense, wonderful conversation about theory and about activism happening. Again, this idea that those two things aren't mutually exclusive is really powerful. Yeah, I mean just related to this question of what are the possibilities and what are the opportunities for scholarly podcasts—you know, this idea of intimacy and of an audio medium potentially being a really effective way to build a listener's or an audience's connection to the ideas being discussed. Obviously I'm intensely biased, because I'm a popular music studies scholar, but I think this idea of there being a particular kind of space that is created whenever you're kind of listening in on these kinds of conversations is a really important one. And is definitely something that I've felt over the years as a frequent podcast listener.

00:22:05 A Yeah. So one of the reasons I really wanted you to join me in this review is because you are moving into a research project about podcasts. So I wanted to also hear—like in your framing of that project, what do you think is scholarly about a podcast? What do you think is feminist about a podcast?

00:22:27 M I mean, I think the thing that's really incredible about podcasts is it has the capacity to be such a grassroots form of media, right? It's not always. And I think it's—I mean obviously it's really hard. You still have to have certain types of technical knowledge and certain types of access and privilege to create, like with anything else. But by and large, I think the reason why we've seen podcasts emerge as this really exciting space for women and queer folks and racialized folks who have been kind of historically kept out of mainstream media spaces is because of that question of possibility and of access. And by those same virtues, I think a lot of those same things continue to kind of preclude podcasts from being folded into media and Canadian media writ large. So there's one episode—I think it might be in the Stacey Copeland episode? They definitely discuss it at some point in the season. Where podcasts continue to not be included under certain federal arts granting structures. So there's still kind of—they're still a fairly new form of media, and they're still not really accounted for in a lot of the ways that would both lend legitimacy to them as a space for conversation and also like support their future, as well. Like I know one of the big conversations happening in podcast scholarship

is this question of like archiving. Like how are these things being preserved? How are these conversations being cared for? So that future audiences, and in this case future scholars, can kind of go back and tap into the conversations happening here. And so as much as it's—we can talk about the project of *Secret Feminist Agenda* as being really interesting from a publishing perspective, from a point of view where we're critical of traditional academic outputs and we're seeing that terrain kind of shift and change in real time, I think it's also a really valuable project for the attention that it's bringing to the ways in which we can preserve podcasts. And kind of—yeah, the ways that we can put them in this framework where they're valuable not just for the conversations as they're happening now, but for people to return to those in time.

00:25:14 A You know, I think we're both scholars who do what Morgan often terms as front-facing—or no, sorry, “public-facing scholarship” I think is your term—the term that you use the most. But yeah. This sort of accessible form of scholarship. So when we're doing a podcast or a zine or whatever that's scholarly, I think the question of rigour comes up. Because outside of the academy, outside of the structures of the peer review and the standardized article and, you know, a dissertation—all of these different kinds of structures. Outside of that, how do we know that it's scholarly? [laughs] And I'm laughing because this is a bit of a devil's advocate question. But it's an opportunity to talk about it. So I'm just curious about your thoughts on that, Morgan?

00:26:07 M I think in a lot of ways, the gift or the opportunity of *Secret Feminist Agenda* is kind of offering this alternate model, right? So rather than kind of reproducing or reifying those traditional values of academic publishing, which is exclusivity, we're going to hide it behind a paywall, and you're going to have to have a particular type of vocabulary to engage with these ideas—the rigour that Hannah McGregor brings to the project—and there is a lot of rigour—but it kind of takes a different form. You know, it's like are we covering all of our bases? Are we considering intersectionality in particular kinds of ways? And so I don't think it's any less rigorous. I think it's perhaps just offering a different framework.

00:26:57 A Right. Like it's rigorous in its commitment to feminist politics, which include accessibility, which include the critique of the academy as this inaccessible, often violent institution that excludes particular groups of people on purpose.

00:27:15 M Yeah, absolutely. I have here, written in my notes as well, “care as a kind of rigour.” I think in previous seasons of *Secret Feminist Agenda*, there was a self-care corner where Hannah and her guests very explicitly kind of engage with these questions of what care might look like within these structures. So yeah. I think there's a lot of potential and there's a lot of power in those types of rigour, as well. You know, what does it look like to build those kinds of mechanisms into our practices as scholars from the ground up?

00:27:55 A Yeah. And I think that's like a really important project for feminist scholarship in general.

00:28:00 M Totally.

00:28:01 A But I also think—so like we were having this conversation where we were like, okay, maybe there might be critiques of this podcast or other kinds of public scholarship that are about rigour. Because maybe there's some hesitancy to let go of these structures. Critiques may come from people who obviously benefit from these structures, who like the exclusivity of the institution and all of that. But I do think it is also like so important to note that Hannah, in collaboration with a few other folks, have worked to develop guidelines for peer-reviewing podcasts. So there are guidelines for it to be rigorous in similar ways to other kinds of work produced in the academy. So I think that that's really, really interesting. I think the other three seasons of *Secret Feminist Agenda* have been peer reviewed. And the peer reviews were also done kind of in podcast form, or like in recorded form. And the—we're starting to see now, I think, other projects taking up the podcast as a potential scholarly output of their research and using these same guidelines that have been developed by Hannah through the Amplified Podcast Network. So Hannah and colleagues. So yeah. So podcasting isn't outside of the concept of rigorous scholarship. It is actually becoming adapted or I think folded into these structures.

00:29:38 M Yeah. More and more so. And I think that's also part of just like a wider conversation happening across academia, you know? As the field or as the industry becomes more precarious, we're looking to these ways of troubling traditional ways of doing things. Because honestly they don't serve a lot of scholars, especially young and emerging scholars. We're learning that we can't really count on these traditional and—I'm just going to go ahead and say outdated modes of publishing or of moving through academic space. And so I think it's really exciting that—we had this moment in our chat the other day. I think it's really exciting that something that is so explicitly challenging those norms is happening in Canada and is happening in such an exciting kind of project form.

00:30:31 A Yeah. Totally! So then the other point of critique, I guess, we wanted to engage with is the kind of format of the alternating minisodes versus longform interview on alternating weeks.

00:30:49 M Yeah! Absolutely. So I think just going back to the podcast as a form where you are perhaps a little more vulnerable as a scholar, right? You are perhaps a little more accountable to your public. I think Hannah McGregor is very explicit from the top of this season about aiming to make it a more sustainable project. So switching to a twice-monthly or, as she calls it, “fortnightly” publication schedule. And another kind of conceit of that sustainability model is alternating shorter minisodes with these longer interviews. We can definitely kind of draw

a direct line between the conversation about sustainability and that transparency to those feminist values that we were just talking about. And then I think there's also another really important conversation to be had—which you brought up, Andi—around the particular kinds of conversations and particular kinds of affect that kind of show up in these minisodes versus the longer, sometimes more focused interview format.

00:32:02 A Yeah. And I think that part of the reason why the minisodes are important is because they do bring—and going back to going back to episode 4.3, “Enthused,” I think Hannah's quite explicit about wanting to bring affect into your scholarly identity and your scholarly practice. And that is part of critiquing—as we kind of mentioned at the top, kind of critiquing the structures of the academy that is like such a crucial element of this podcast project. And I also wanted to note that Carla Rice is a scholar at the University of Guelph who actually was one of the peer reviewers of I think season two, if not other seasons of *Secret Feminist Agenda*. But I just wanted to kind of note that in her review of it, the minisodes were actually a standout for her. So while we were wondering, oh, are these as valuable for other people? Carla Rice in particular, this was like a highlight. So I think that that's—and I think that they were a highlight because they offered this kind of meditative opportunity for taking like a little break and also having the opportunity to talk about feelings more. Like feelings or affect or things that are more maybe internal. Anyway, I just wanted to note that I thought that was really interesting.

00:33:31 M Yeah! I guess—totally. I think one metaphor, one analogy I maybe want to draw on here—again, my research is feminist popular music studies, and so I'm thinking a lot about these questions of publics and audiences and what it means to be accessible to fans in particular ways. It feels weird to self-identify as a fan of Hannah McGregor, but here we are.

00:33:59 A [laughs]

00:34:00 M But there's this notion that I run across in my research of like, you know, back stage versus front stage spaces. And so particularly in writing around things like punk house shows, one of the values and one of the kind of cool things about those types of performances is that the performers are so accessible and they are just kind of right on your level, both figuratively and literally. And so I think, you know, we can talk about podcasts on the whole as a medium or as a form that doesn't have a lot of back stage space. Or certainly less so than something like a peer reviewed journal article. And I think to a certain extent that's mediated, obviously, by editing and by the choices that the host makes. But I think there's something really cool happening in the minisodes, where Hannah's actually really intentionally calling attention to that. And kind of welcoming you into the more kind of mundane or everyday or like that back stage space even more. Which is perhaps why they kind of resonate so much with particular listeners.

00:35:23 A Yeah. It's really interesting to think about the form and like what it does. Okay. So what do you think are some of the explicit objectives of season four of *Secret Feminist Agenda*?

00:35:35 M Yeah. I mean, I think—I keep coming back to this idea of connection, right? Like I think Hannah is really explicit about—at the end of the day this started out as a project for her to meet people and find friends in a new community and kind of have these conversations within a bit more of a structured container. And so I think in that regard, you know, it's a complete success. There's been four wonderful seasons and tons of incredible guests and, you know, us as audiences, as listeners have kind of joined her on that journey. So I think in very simplistic terms, it accomplished those objectives.

00:36:17 A Yeah. And I think one of the goals for this season anyways, from the outset, was named as “keeping it local.” And this obviously became complicated with the onset of COVID-19 pandemic. But I think throughout, as we've noted, the kind of idea of place and space like remained constant. I do think that it really succeeded in making us think about space. Like the spaces and places in which feminist activism or public intellectualism can occur. Like by talking to all sorts of different feminists in different fields doing different projects. And I think many of the guests on the podcast really talked about like, yeah, the creation of space. Whether it was through like the bookstore episode or like through histories of drag, thinking about spaces as they evolve—I think that that was actually pretty successful.

00:37:13 M The only other thing I guess I would add to that or the only other thing that comes to mind about this question of objectives is that there was a really—this came up a few different times over the season, but there was a really explicit and really gorgeous conversation in the very final episode of this season with Eugenia Zuroski around this question of what does it mean to even have objectives for activism or for feminist work? Because so much of the time, you know—I think I used this metaphor the other day when we touched base—but I think so much of the time, there isn't a kind of finite task or a sense of—a place where you'll get to where you feel like it's finished. The goal is really just kind of doing the thing or trying the thing in new ways, and kind of leaving more room for those who come up behind us. And I think in that way—I mean, it's kind of a horrible paradox, right? It's a goal about not having goals. But I think in that way, *Secret Feminist Agenda* is also modelling this process where the way that scholarly publishing works is being questioned and broken apart and put back together. And so maybe the goal is that there is no goal. Maybe the goal is just that it happened and it was cool and we got to listen, you know?

00:38:58 A Yeah. And I'm also thinking about the theme for this special issue of the *Engaged Scholar Journal*, thinking about like collaboration. And I think producing things in collaboration is still, I think, a bit of a friction against the idea of the individualist, neoliberal

scholar. So I think that like in seeking out to like interview all of these different people about their ways of engaging with feminism, you know, broadly, is a really—is demonstrative of like, yeah, a critique of neoliberalism. The neoliberal university. And I think—yeah, and what is the theme? “Challenging Exceptionalist Imaginaries.” So it’s like, we don’t get there on our own. Collaboration is really important. And I think that doing a podcast with all of these interviews with all of these people and still emphasizing citational practice throughout—even though it’s a podcast and you don’t necessarily read it, but there’s the show notes and there’s ways of citing people through speech, of course. So I think that the form of a podcast is—yeah, really underscores those kind of feminist challenges to the university that are about like collaboration and politicizing citational practice. So I think in that way, too, it succeeds at like creating a model of feminist scholarship.

00:40:41 M Yeah! Absolutely. And I think that kind of brings us full circle. Obviously, you know, you were asked to do this review, you invited me on board. And so I hope, yeah—in some small way, I hope this kind of peek into our process of thinking about this podcast and this project kind of mirrors those same politics and those same objectives.

00:41:09 A Yeah. It kind of reminds me of—you were talking about the backstage analogy. And when we were kind of conceptualizing this—how we were going to do this review, we had kind of thrown around this idea of calling this podcast slash review “Show Your Work.” Because the conversations—it’s like actually kind of cool to be able to have access to like the conversation part, which feels like more of the backstage part of the review. Like we’re kind of working it out. It’s not concise and finely tuned yet. And so I think it’s really important to kind of show the process, and I think that’s also kind of like what a podcast does. Like you’ve mentioned, it invites an audience into the more intimate process of thinking, rather than only showing the like very polished final product.

00:42:09 M Yeah. The more intimate and also like the more kind of gatekept, for lack of better terms. Like I think we’ve both had lots of conversations about the kind of... you know, the knowledge that you only—or the things you only find out about the university once you’re in the university. And so I think kind of making that messy work in progress a little more public and a little more legible is only going to encourage people who are maybe intimidated by that kind of—yeah, those kinds of like institutional knowledge that they wouldn’t otherwise have access to.

00:43:01 A Mhm. Yeah. I think that’s really cool. But I will be interested to see how podcasting does get folded into, you know, scholarship. And how we’ll feel about it. [laughs] You know, as—yeah, as it becomes more integrated.

00:43:25 M Yeah. And how it will kind of probably continue to exist in tension with these longer ideas about institutional legitimacy and authority.

00:43:38 A Yeah. To be continued! [laughs]

00:43:38 [TRANSITION MUSIC]

00:43:46 A So thank you everyone for listening to our podcast style review of season four of the podcast *Secret Feminist Agenda* by Hannah McGregor. I'm Andi Schwartz. You can find me on the internet, on Instagram, at @acafemmeic or my website andschwartzwrites.com.

00:44:08 M Thank you to Andi for having me on this one-off episode of *ESJ* reviews. You can find me on the internet at morganbimm.com or on Twitter at @bimmbles, because I am very funny.

00:44:27 [TRANSITION MUSIC]

00:44:30 A This review was recorded in Toronto, Canada, a place originally known as Tkaronto, which has been taken care of by the Anishinabek nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat.

00:44:42 [OUTRO MUSIC: DONKEY KONG BY MOM JEANS]