

Episode 3.4 Parenting, Mental Health, and Drinking Wine in a Rec Room with Marcelle Kosman

October 26, 2018

Hannah (Host):

[00:08](#)

[Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans"] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Happy Halloween Week! I know Halloween week isn't a thing, but by the time the next episode comes out, Halloween will be over. This episode isn't even remotely thematically appropriate to Halloween except in so far as feminism is always a little bit spooky, but I know that for many of you out there, Halloween is a very special holiday. As I tweeted recently, I feel, to a degree that I think is off brand for me, kind of ambivalent about Halloween. I like some aspects of it, but I feel that I would really reach my Halloween sweet spot were I able to have a home that I could decorate spookily, dress up like a witch, and hand out candy to children. So if anybody in Vancouver has access to a house that they would like to just let me decorate and hand out candy to children while dressed as a witch, that would be really great. Just hit me up. As it is, I feel like Halloween often involves dressing up in a costume and going to a bar, and I like staying home. So if anybody wants to dress up like a person in yoga pants and come over to watch *Hocus Pocus* and *Nightmare Before Christmas*, hit me up. That's what we're doing. Before we launch into the episode, I also want to plug, once again, the upcoming Vancouver Podcast Festival. It's happening November 8th to 10th, that's a Thursday through Saturday here in Vancouver. There is a ton of really amazing stuff happening as part of the festival that includes the first ever live episode of *Secret Feminist Agenda*. I can't confirm the guests yet, but I guarantee that they are going to be awesome. That is happening on Friday, November 9th at 1:00 PM at the Vancouver Public Library. Also happening on November 10th also at the Vancouver Public Library Downtown location is a Harry Potter Podfest, which I'm going to be hosting, which is going to be an absolute blast. There's going to be games, and debates, and conversations about fandom and podcasting, and I'll probably acquire a fun hat for the purposes. See aforementioned interest in dressing up like a witch. There's also really amazing master classes that you can take if you're interested in getting into podcasting or improving your podcasting skills, and there are some really exciting shows happening at The Rio in the evenings that feature interviews with podcasters and live podcasts from some really amazing local podcasts, to a bunch of fantastic international guests. You can go to vanpodfest.ca to check out

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the whole program. You can get tickets to individual shows, or you can get passes for the whole thing, and I think it's going to be really great and amazing. And if you like podcasts, which you obviously do because you're listening to a podcast right now, you should come. Alright, enough plugs, enough spooky Halloween thoughts. It's time to meet Marcelle. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Marcelle Kosman is a Ph.D. candidate in English at the University of Alberta where she studies and teaches multiple iterations of Canadian popular culture and canonicity. Her doctoral project tackles the peculiar intersections of popular culture, nationalism, and white feminism in early Canadian women's science fiction and fantasy writing. Her work has been published in the journals, *English Studies in Canada*, in *Comedy Studies*. She is also, alongside me, cohost of the feminist *Harry Potter* podcast *Witch, Please*. Marcelle and I sat down in her amazing vintage rec room to talk, not about popular print culture or nationalism, but about parenting and mental health and probably a bunch of other things. So let's check it out. [Music: "Postdoc Blues" by John K. Samson]

- Hannah (Host): [04:28](#) So this is a podcast about feminism.
- Marcelle: [05:07](#) That seems weird.
- Hannah (Host): [05:07](#) Yeah, and what we do is I interview feminist humans, who I find interesting, about a topic of their choosing. And sometimes those interviews are like, really focused around a specific topic because I approached the person based on that thing, right? So you know, I know about this work or this project you're doing, so I'm going to talk to you about this. And then other times it's, sort of, a more free-form conversation because I approached the person just because I know them and think that they are an interesting feminist. But you and I-- but that's not the case with you. [laughs] I said "but" so quickly.
- Marcelle: [05:48](#) [Laughs] But! Settle down Kosman, you are neither interesting, nor someone I know.
- Hannah (Host): [06:04](#) [Laughs] Bitch, I don't know you. Well there was going to say it's, but you and I texted a bit in advance about what you would like to talk about [laughs] because there was a wide range of possible topics. For listeners who don't know, which is nobody, because my listener, my entire listenership is just 5% of the *Witch, Please* listenership.
- Marcelle: [06:26](#) Can you imagine if you have listeners who are like, what is this "Witch, Please?"

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- Hannah (Host): [06:30](#) So for any listeners who don't know, Marcelle and I make a podcast, made a podcast,
- Marcelle: [06:38](#) We're still making it!
- Hannah (Host): [06:38](#) I see no evidence of that. We're, we're bringing to a close the final season of a podcast called Witch, Please, which is a feminist reading of the Harry Potter series. So Marcelle is the person who taught me how to podcast, and now I teach workshops on podcasts too, which is the funniest thing in the universe because everything I know about podcasts and I learned from Marcelle and Trevor.
- Marcelle: [07:06](#) You are self taught. I taught you like, that podcasting is possible, [laughs] and that the bar to entry once you have the shit is like, you know, but like, no, you, you're largely, vastly, immensely self-taught. You work very hard to learn skills, Hannah, it's one of your greatest skills.
- Hannah (Host): [07:26](#) I'm good at learning and that is true.
- Marcelle: [07:28](#) And doing!
- Hannah (Host): [07:28](#) And eventually at doing the thing that I have learned. So the thing that we agreed that we would talk about today in this really exciting Stranger Things era rec room that we're currently sitting in, wainscoting et. al., is that we were going to talk about mental health and grad school. Oh, mental health and parenting.
- Marcelle: [07:49](#) Grad school, too!
- Hannah (Host): [07:51](#) Yeah. Fuck grad school, though. We're talking about mental health and parenting. Why is that? Why is that a topic that you thought was worth, was worth delving into on a podcast? I am interested like, I think, I think at the base of a lot of public conversations about mental health, especially mental health around things like parenting, is a sense of the, the ongoing and absolutely crushing stigma that is attached to mental health. In general I see like a really beautiful move, I think particularly with millennials to de-stigmatize conversations about mental health.
- Marcelle: [08:27](#) Millennials are killing stigma.

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- Hannah (Host): [08:31](#) [Laughs] Yeah. Well said. And mental health tends to be more stigmatized the more it's like, in the context of something that is socially prescribed as joyous.
- Marcelle: [08:45](#) Oh yeah, yeah.
- Hannah (Host): [08:45](#) Right. So it's like it's less, there's less stigma around talking about mental health and grad school because like, everybody knows grad school is hard, and it's fine if you cry every day while you're in school. But parenting seems like, the expectation of how you will respond emotionally to parenting and of what it looks like to be a good parent, strikes me, as a non parent, as a context in which there would be even more, even more stigma.
- Marcelle: [09:11](#) I mean, I guess to be honest, one of the reasons why I wanted to talk about parenting and mental health is because I'm really bad at making choices. [Laughs] I did, it was like pretty excited about talking about both of those things, but they are, they, I mean, I don't want to talk about the relationship between them. That's not true. I do. And they are very deeply intertwined for me because I started taking my mental health seriously around the same time that I became a parent. I'm sorry. I just love wordplay so much, and so it was like around the same time I became a parent, or it became apparent to me that it was a problem. You're welcome, oh my god.
- Hannah (Host): [09:50](#) So you would like to also talk about them separately, is what you're saying.
- Marcelle: [10:02](#) I don't know, whatever you want.
- Hannah (Host): [10:02](#) [Giggles]
- Hannah (Host): [10:02](#) You're the boss. What do you want to talk about? I'm here for you. Oh I want to talk about parenting first. So you are the first close friend I had who had a parent, who had a parent. [Laughs]
- Marcelle: [10:13](#) Wow
- Hannah (Host): [10:13](#) One sec, just gonna drink some more of this wine.
- Marcelle: [10:21](#) [Laughs]
- Hannah (Host): [10:21](#) It's fine. You are the first close friend I had who had a child. Which is not to say I have other very close friends who have kids who are older than you, but I was not as close to them when they had those children. Because I was in Edmonton when you

got pregnant and Eliot was born. So he was the first, can I say his name on this podcast? Great. He was the first baby who was like in my life in the sense of like, I saw him on day two and then most days subsequently for the first six months of his life, and then as often as I can since then. But that means that you were also the first person who I really got to be up close and personal with as you learned to parent and I know that for a lot of us, like a lot of your community who were experiencing the same, like we've never had a close friend become a parent before, concern a lot of us had was that it would transform something. Because we all had this vague sense of like, "well parents are different kinds of people. Like, parents are adults and so I guess now that you're a parent you won't be our friend anymore." And the really revolutionary thing from the outside was being like, "oh, she's the same person just also with a child now." Was that, was that how you experienced it as well?

Marcelle: [11:45](#)

Let me tell you that I had a 100% of those same fears. It seems like, it seems almost silly now thinking about it that these were concerns because they haven't come to fruition. So much about my life is different, so, so, so much. I was really afraid that people wouldn't want to be my friend anymore. I was really afraid that people were going to be like, "babies are a bummer." Also, I've, I'm an only child. I mean that's not technically true. It's, my mom was a single mom and raised me and I'm her only child so I didn't grow up with siblings. I had never been around babies in a real way until I had one. I was one of those assholes who would like, want to move seats on a method of public transportation if I was near a baby because I was extremely self righteous about not believing in reproduction. It's not that I didn't believe in it in terms of like, one doesn't believe in God. It was like, I knew that it was, I knew that it was real, I just thought it was like morally conspicuous. So, so, so, so like, you know, I won't give you the details of like, how I became a parent or do you want them?

Hannah (Host): [13:15](#)

Yeah, I do. I think people know how babies are made, but I am curious about what took you from being somebody who was like, "real feminists don't have children." To somebody who was like, "yeah, baby time! let's go."

Marcelle: [13:27](#)

I think a lot of my anxiety about like, whether or not people would be friends with me is because I didn't want to be friends with people who had kids. So, okay. So in answer to your question, my partner, Trevor and I have long talked about wanting to adopt and our intentions when we started a family to adopt. Over, I would say, the last, basically since I started my masters, I started doing research into public adoption because

that seemed to us to be the thing that made the most sense. Public adoption, open adoption, so that you maintain relationships with either the birth parents themselves, or the families of the birth parents so that your child doesn't have to do all of that work on their own. It just seemed really, really good and important. But I had a lot of anxiety about my capacity to to be a parent. So like that probably doesn't surprise anybody who's like, "well yeah, like if you think having children is morally reprehensible, like, like yeah, it makes sense that you have some concerns about whether or not you can be a parent." [Laughs] But like again, this, this really comes from the fact that I didn't grow up with children. I didn't grow up around people who had children. None of my close friends had children. And so all of a sudden it kind of became important to me to learn how to be a parent before trying to be a parent for a child who potentially like really needed strong and stable parents. Like a lot of kids who are in the public system-- Maybe, I think it might be fair to say most of the kids who were adopted through the public system, they've experienced some kind of early childhood trauma. Even if that trauma is just being taken away from their loving parents. Like that in and of itself is pretty... That's a huge trauma. Right? And so to, to hand a child over who needs loving, stable, competent, confident parents to a couple of jackasses who are like, "yeah, we know what we're doing." That suddenly seemed to me to be equally morally reprehensible, and so maybe it would be a good idea to try this whole parenting thing out with... This is, I'm realizing such a like profoundly privileged and navel gazey thing, but I mean you invited me on your podcast, so here I am. So we had a baby, we were so lucky and so fortunate that it was a, it was an uncomplicated pregnancy. It was an uncomplicated birth. It's sucked, but it was an uncomplicated labor and delivery. All of which is to say it turns out we're okay parents, we didn't need to do this.

Hannah (Host): [16:27](#) [Laughs] Need to do this. I don't. Okay.

Marcelle: [16:29](#) I love my child so much!

Hannah (Host): [16:29](#) I don't, I don't quite buy the narrative of Eliot as a burner kid. But I do hear the like, "well let's find out if we can have a kid all." The whole, I mean the entire conversation about fertility and like the challenges therein is, I mean, even just a conversation for another, another episode, but you just, you just don't know. But would it be correct to say that having a child has changed your perspective on having children, or is that inaccurate, do you think? Still think it's morally reprehensible?

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- Marcelle: [17:10](#) [Laughs] That's an interesting question. I don't think that biological reproduction is morally reprehensible anymore. I'm, I am always growing. I am always trying to be a better person. So that is true. The thing that I really, really, really want to say is that it has absolutely, under no circumstances, changed my position on abortion, which is that it should be safe and legal, and for whatever reason. I don't care. Honestly. I think the reason why I want to bring that up is because I know for some people having babies makes them think that all babies are more important than the bodies of the people who are pregnant with the fetuses that will eventually become babies. This is also a different topic for a different show. It has also in some ways really changed my feelings about babies and children. My brother-in-law and sister-in-law recently had a very challenging pregnancy, and a very challenging birth, and their newborn is doing wonderfully. I'm so happy to say. And I feel like I have been fond of other people's kids, but this is the first time that I've been like, I feel an emotional attachment to a child that isn't my own. And I thought that I knew what that felt like already with friends who I love, who have kids but this all of us. And I'm like, oh no, no, no, no, no, no. Like it feels like I wanna like, like touch and hold this baby. Like I see pictures of him and I'm like, now I understand why people got so excited when they saw Eliot because for a long time and people will be like, "oh my God, I love him. He's so cute." And I'd be like, "is he?"
- Hannah (Host): [18:59](#) [Laughs]
- Marcelle: [18:59](#) I like, I bonded. I bonded with him as a baby, but I was like, "yeah, why though?"
- Hannah (Host): [19:06](#) We all loved Eliot so much from day one. Like we were just collectively obsessed. I remember really vividly when Eliot was like, maybe five days old, you brought him to our mutual friend Neal's wedding, and--
- Marcelle: [19:23](#) He was six days old.
- Hannah (Host): [19:23](#) --He was six days old. And you were excited to have like a brief, just opportunity to be like, "somebody else hold this baby. I'm going to talk to adults." And the wedding was at the Muttart, which is a series of greenhouses that are attached together.
- Marcelle: [19:39](#) Pyramid shaped.
- Hannah (Host): [19:39](#) Pyramid shaped greenhouses. And Clair and I took Eliot. We absconded with him into one of those pyramids and then we

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took turns holding him and it was just the funniest thing because one of us would hold him for five minutes and then the other one would be like, "no, it's my turn now." [Laughs] And it just felt like a couple of witches that had snatch this baby and run into a forest with him. And we're like, "he's my baby!" We just loved him so much from day one. And I, I know that you also loved him very deeply from day one.

Marcelle: [20:15](#) I love him more now.

Hannah (Host): [20:15](#) But also, you would come, we would be like, "this baby's so cute," and you'd be like, "I think he has, he has an unusual head to torso ratio. I think that that creates a higher effect of cuteness in him as per...". And we were like, "Marcelle, what is happening? What has happened?" Like, you have never been sentimental about parenting the way a lot of other people are. Like, you very obviously love and care for your child very deeply. You don't care for your chi-- You don't, yeah, no, you do care for your child deeply. Your inability to use words is catching

Marcelle: [20:54](#) [Laughs]

Hannah (Host): [20:54](#) but you are not one to wax rhapsodic about parenting. And I think at first I, part of me thought that that was because so much of your community here doesn't have kids and you felt like you couldn't or shouldn't express those feelings because we would feel, you know, because of the politics of it. Because it suggests the, sort of, the much dreaded narrative of the new parent which says, "Oh, you've never really known love. I know love now your life is incomplete until you also successfully reproduce." So I think I thought, I thought that you were sort of like, maybe self-censoring a bit, but the longer it's been the less, I think that's the case.

Marcelle: [21:37](#) I definitely like Eliot more the older he gets, and I know that that's not everybody's experience. Some people love being pregnant, some people love having babies. Catherine Strader loves babies. Anyway. I just every, every stage of independence that Eliot has achieved, every modicum of humanness and s-- and like, I mean to say "socialization" is, is weird and complicated, but like every, every new thing that he does and learns, in this way of becoming a person, has just expanded my fascination with him and love for him exponentially. So much so that sometimes like, when I look at baby pictures of him, I'm like what did we do with him? Like he didn't know how to use his hands. He used to drop, he would like, he had this chew toy that was shaped, it's like a thick, almost two dimensional, but like

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obviously it was three dimensional cause it was a toy, but I dunno, whatever. Physicists get out of here.

Hannah (Host): [22:37](#) [Laughs] Physicists!

Marcelle: [22:37](#) He would like chew on it. And then he would like try to touch it with his hand and he would drop it on his face, and then he would cry because he couldn't get it off his face. It was like, "what do people like about that?"

Hannah (Host): [22:50](#) [Laughs]

Marcelle: [22:50](#) And like, I did, I did love him. And I have other memories that are like incredible where there was one time when he was sitting in his like, rocky chair thing in the kitchen and I was shaking out a fresh garbage bag to put in the garbage. And he thought that seeing that garbage bag like, billow full of air and make that sort of snappy, cracky noise that a garbage bag makes when you like, just like, pop it out into the air. He thought that was the funniest thing he'd ever seen. And he just laughed and laughed and so I did it a whole bunch and was like "this is amazing!" So like, each thing that has made him more of a person has made me love him more than I thought was possible. And what was your question even?

Hannah (Host): [23:42](#) Yeah. You're not a like, "parenting changes everything."

Marcelle: [23:44](#) No, no I don't. I definitely don't think that parenting changes everything. And I don't think that every child is easy, and every person is just like, waiting for this opportunity to give love to a tiny creature. Like, everybody-- What a ridiculous thing to say. Everybody's different, including babies. And Eliot is for me and I think that I'm a pretty good parent, but I'm not sure that I would say that parenting is for me, and I would absolutely never say that parenting is for everyone and that your life is in any way incomplete if you don't have children. Like, the idea that children complete you in some way is so, I don't even have the words for how not okay that is to think or believe, but also how just like, inaccurate it is. And so there is so much judgment around like, "well if you don't feel this way about your baby, you're not doing it right. If you don't enjoy this part of parenting, there's something wrong with you." Which I guess brings us back to your initial question about like-- Here's your transition Hannah-- your, your initial question, but mental health and parenting and how if you are not responding in the socially prescribed way to a quote unquote "joyous" experience, then there's something wrong with you and that may not be true. It might just be that you are a good and perfect person in

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your own right and having a baby sucks in a lot of ways, except for in the ways that it doesn't. And those ways are going to be different for every person and yeah, here, here's the mic. I don't know.

Hannah (Host): [25:26](#) I can't remember who it was but I read I think, I think today on Twitter somebody saying that they are always so surprised that people who are really sure they want to be parents are so judgmental of people who are really sure they don't want to be parents, because that surety come from the same place. Like, it comes from a place of self-knowledge and an awareness of like, the seriousness of parenting. And there is something for me about like, seeing people who are sure and either way that I'm like, "I really admire that surety." The ambivalence is a bit hard. The ambivalence is very like, I feel very, very ambivalent about the prospect of having kids. And it's very like, "well shit." I mean at some point you got to do or, do or don't do. You either parent or you don't.

Marcelle: [26:12](#) I think that part of where that comes from is the sense that, and I don't know, I don't know where the sense comes from, but the sense that every time you make a decision to keep things the same way that they are, it doesn't feel like a real decision in the way that change feels like a decision. Do you know what I mean? So like, if you are in a job that you don't like and you are thinking all the time about quitting, but you kind of do like it, or it's like, good for you in certain ways, or are you, you can't get better benefits somewhere else. Whatever reason, there are reasons to stay. Every time you decide to stay it doesn't feel like a decision. And I think that you can apply that same thing to continuing to decide not to have children, continuing to decide to stay in a relationship, or continuing to decide to not move, like, continuing to decide to stay in your current state. It doesn't have a marker to make it feel like a decision, and so it's always kind of treated as impermanent. And so people who choose not to have children and who feel good about that decision are are so often treated as, "Well like, you just don't, like, you don't know how you're going to feel later." It's like, "well I fucking know how I feel now." I think all of these things are like, rational choices that we make for specific reasons, and it's okay to make new decisions when circumstances change or when you, I don't know when like, the cost-- Sorry, sorry about, sorry about this.

Hannah (Host): [27:50](#) [Laughs] Cost benefit analysis!

Marcelle: [27:50](#) Sorry about this capitalist interpretation of your life choices. But like when the cost benefit analysis of the decision that you had made prior to is all of a sudden complicated by new information

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like, the information like, "Oh shit. I actually don't know if I would be any good at parenting," for a variety of very legitimate reasons which I won't go into because you know the public nature of podcasts.

Hannah (Host):

[28:14](#)

[Laughs] The public nature of podcasts. I recently ran into a colleague who I met at the new faculty orientation. This colleague started at the same time as me. And we, we are not friends, we just run into each other from time to time and know each other. And every time I run into this person they give me an update on their life. And the update on their life is like a parody of checking off the boxes of what a life ought to look like, and it is very interesting to try to have a conversation with somebody who reports out on their life like that. So is like, you know, "here's the status of my rela-- like, we have become engaged. The wedding as scheduled. We are anticipate, we are planning to have a child within the first year of our marriage, and so anticipate purchasing a two bedroom condo. Though it will be okay if the condo is one bedroom and a den because we only anticipate staying in that condo for five years. And the child will be small enough for the five year..." And I'm just like, would that, I could blind myself to end this conversation. Sorry if this colleague is listening, but get better at small talk. But it's such an interesting like, my life does not consist of a series of socially box checking, and so to report back and be like, "I remain a spinster. I have acquired a second cat. She is smaller than the first, but she's very good. She's very soft. Sometimes I'm petting her and then I pet my other cat, and I'm like, guy's made out of fucking steel wool, what's up. Thought he was soft until I got this new cat. Now I'm like, I don't even want to touch you."

Marcelle:

[30:13](#)

[Laughs] yes, yeah, yeah. As a kind of corollary if I may, I live with my partner and our almost three year old. He is one week away from being three at the time of this recording. Bless him. We live with another couple and another roommate. We are all adults at least, in our late twenties, many of us being in our mid-thirties. Yeah like, I live in a shared household. And you know like, Trevor and Elliott and I have the top floor of the house, and we have our own bathroom and, and we have our own bathroom, Rob and Sylvie have their own bathroom, Jason has his own bathroom. This is the key. Everybody deserves their own bathroom. But like, we live with roommates essentially. We do. We absolutely live in a shared house, and 90% of the space that I occupy is common space. And we definitely feel like a family. It feels more like a family than roommates. So it's, it's a bit complicated. But anyway, the point that I'm trying to make is that people are weird about it. People are weird when they're like, "oh you have roommates?" And so the one of the initial

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assumptions is, "oh you left your partner and are now living with your child with roommates." And it's like, "I live with my partner with roommates." And they're like, "oh, why?" Like, "I'm sorry, do you have retirement savings? Like who can afford a house?" [Laughs]

Hannah (Host): [31:49](#) So it's also nice to have other people around when you have a little kid. So you can be like, "hey, I need to run out to the grocery store. Can you be with this child for half an hour?" Like, the assumption that one, that there needs to be two parents only to the ratio of however many children you have. And that for some reason the caretaker number is not allowed to increase even as the child number does is just, it's, I would say it's baffling, but I've read Foucault and so I'm not baffled by it. But it is dumb, I will say that. May I ask you one more question about parenting? So we've talked about being a good parent and it reminds me of a conversation I was having about you as parent recently with my hairdresser.

Marcelle: [32:39](#) [Laughs]

Hannah (Host): [32:39](#) And we were talking about the way that you will be-- there are a small number of stances, perspectives, opinions, that otherwise seemingly chill people will surprise me with. So for me in my experience, the most common one is that I will be talking to a person who is like, a cool anti-racist feminist, and then they will come out with some fucking gender essentialist bullshit around children. And it is very often with the stance of like, "well you don't understand, you don't have kids. Wait until you have a little boy, then you'll know they are born wanting trucks." And so I wonder if you might, if you might, I know that that is a thing that has come up raising Eliot. I'm wondering if you, if you would like to comment on like just that unbelievable baggage people bring to bear on the gender of your child.

Marcelle: [33:36](#) So very obviously I've been using he/him pronouns. So I don't want to give the impression that I think that I'm doing, I guess what I want to say is that every gendered thing we do, or every gendered thing we say about Eliot, right down to his pronouns, that we have imposed on him has a great big ol' asterisk next to it, which is as soon as he gives us some indication of what those pronouns should be, we will, we will go there. And I have described this as being lazy before. I like, self-identify as this being lazy because I know that there are people who are doing a really good job at resisting that, and that was just, it was, it was a battle that I didn't think that I could fight. And I like feel really complicated and shitty about it, and so I'm trying to make up for it and in other ways. And I would be a liar if I said that I

wasn't filled with anxiety about whether or not I'm like, doing him a disservice in the long run. And I think, I think that it is true that probably most parents feel a lot of anxiety about whether or not they're doing their children a disservice about some thing or another. So this is the thing for me. There is actually a mum whose child goes to the daycare that Eliot goes to, who is convinced that Eliot is a girl. And it is so incredible to me the way that anything that is feminized will automatically outweigh all of the masculinized things. It's amazing she made-- that people make these leaps and it has really like hammered home to me how easily people make assumptions about gender. Not just like, yeah, not just with children, but with adults too. And how weird that is. How weird it is to assume gender in a way that I had not really experienced before. Like, I sort of understood theoretically based on, you know, reading and learning that that gender is performative, but like seeing how it's imposed on children based on like bulldozer iconography or, or the color pink is so just wild to me. I don't understand it. So because Eliot goes to a very mainstream daycare, he gets told things like, "you're a good boy, you're a smart boy, you're a strong boy." However that Bare Naked Ladies song goes, I can't remember. I was going to sing it but I can't remember. It doesn't matter. And so he would come home and he'll say things like, "I'm a, I'm a strong boy because I can do this." And we'll say things like, "yeah, you're a strong kid. You are so strong. What a strong..." And we say "bear" a lot. We called him Boo Bear for so long because that inclination that I had to to say like, "good boy" or whatever like, "sweet boy," whatever. I tried to replace with another, another term so that I wouldn't be like, telling him what his gender is. It's ex-- Oh my god. Just talking about it is exhausting because I don't want to do a bad job. Parents don't want to do a bad job, but also like, you know, you're going to do a bad job.

Hannah (Host): [37:04](#) [Laughs]

Marcelle: [37:06](#) About some things!

Hannah (Host): [37:08](#) So let's segue, on the topic of the face that you're making at me right now. Let's segue into talking about mental health a bit. Because I feel like probably having a kid might be pretty triggering for anxiety or, or at least focalize a lot of that anxiety because there is so much messaging around all of the things you could, and probably are doing wrong, and so much social pressure, and so many strangers in public judging [laughing] your decision making. It's just so much. But I'm curious to hear you say, because you said that, that around the time that you had helliot. Had helliot. Was the time that you also started

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paying attention to your mental health. Do you think that is a coincidence?

Marcelle:

[38:01](#)

Oh, with just the biggest caveat. Part of me thinks it's a coincidence, but also, pardon me, fully recognizes that there are no coincidences! I don't know, like, whatever. Yeah, no, it like, it could be a coincidence. It could not be a coincidence. I don't know. I think it's important to say that I haven't been diagnosed with postpartum depression and I don't think that I have postpartum depression. And the reason why I think that's important to say is because postpartum depression is absolutely real and absolutely valid thing in and of itself that is separate from the experiences that I've had, which are different because I have repressed my own mental health for my entire life. Or maybe "repressed my mental health" isn't the right way to word it, but like, not recognized or not given adequate attention to my own mental health for my entire life for very different reasons. And I think that they're important to separate because I don't know what the experience of postpartum depression is like, and so I don't want to speak on behalf of people who experienced that. If that, if that makes sense. Yeah. So I guess there's part of me that wants to say like, "oh yeah, well like now that I had a child I needed to get my shit together." And that's not exactly how it happened. I think maybe something that's true is that having Eliot has made me extremely tired, because children. Maybe some children are just like super chill, but, and Eliot is, is very easy but high energy, and I'm just tired all the time. And that, that exhaustion exacerbated my depression in a way that I could never have anticipated because I've been, I think a fairly high functioning depressive person for most of my life, and that just wasn't possible anymore. And I didn't even realize that my problem was depression for a long time. I knew that I was having anxiety attacks, but I didn't know that I was having depression because I thought that maybe I was just sick, or that I was just tired because having a kid makes you tired. Or you know, I have a lot of dietary restrictions and so maybe my diet was off and, or maybe like, I had a new food allergy that I didn't know about. Like I just, I went for, for testing. I went for all kinds of things to figure out what was wrong with me and our wonderful friend Claire was like, "it sounds like maybe that's depression." And I was like, "fuck you! You don't know my life. You don't know me." And she was like, "yeah, okay. I mean, you know, not being able to get out of bed and being exhausted all the time, no matter how much you sleep. It's just that it sounds like depression." I'm like, "fuck off, Claire. You don't know me."

Hannah (Host):

[41:12](#)

I'm sure it will not surprise you. No, I've already told you that Claire and I had conversations about your depression.

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- Marcelle: [41:19](#) [Laughs]
- Hannah (Host): [41:19](#) I love talking to Claire about mental health because she has a longer history of being somebody who talks about it, and so can talk about it in a very open frank way without any sense of shame attached to it. And it makes me, and she just seems to take a great deal of pleasure in talking to you about your mental health is going. So it's always like kind of fun. But yeah, there's no other person in my life as much who was like, "that sounds like depression. Come on, talk about your depression." It's like it's a really good person to have in your life if you need to really just be gently bullied into recognizing that you are having struggles. So was it, was it those conversations with friends that finally convinced you, or was there some, was there a "eureka!" moment where you were like, "Yeah, okay."
- Marcelle: [42:11](#) What a good question. Like, I've been going to therapy since I was in the ninth grade, so it's not that I haven't been trying to take care of my mental health in some way. It's that-- I don't even like, it's, it's weird. You know how when your perspective on something changes, you kind of can't remember how it was that you rationalize things before?
- Hannah (Host): [42:33](#) Yeah.
- Marcelle: [42:33](#) Yeah. So before I started taking antidepressants, I was very much of the opinion that they were people who needed medication and there were people who didn't. And I was a person who didn't need medication. And before that perspective I was under the impression that nobody needed medication except people who had some kind of virus or disease, and medication would help those people. And so like, sure. Yeah. People who are HIV positive, they absolutely need medication, but people who are depressed, that's not a real thing. You don't need medication. I know it's super fucked up. So I also like I'm, you know, you and I are the same age, Hannah, but like when we were teenagers, Prozac was a thing. And Prozac in my memory was the first prescription drug that kind of went mainstream because everybody was being prescribed it. And teenagers were being prescribed it. And that seemed like a weird change. And then I f-- I might be remembering this wrong, but it feels like shortly after Prozac became a thing, all of a sudden ADHD medication became a thing. So like, everybody was on Ritalin or some some version thereof. So like the sense of we live in an overmedicated society was very much a, a topic of conversation. And I think those conversations came out of the same stigma around mental health and of course, understandably, fed those same stigmas. And so even though I

recognize the value of therapy, it just didn't even occur to me that I needed more than just talking to somebody, even once a week. So I think that the "eureka!" moment was probably when I went home in May, or May and June Trevor and Eliot and I went back to Ontario. We spent a little bit of time in Montreal and we've visited with both of our families. And it was a two-week long trip and I spent all but two days of that two week long trip, having just an ongoing panic attack. It was like a low level but consistent panic attack where I couldn't interact with anybody. I couldn't breathe properly. I cried a whole bunch because I felt overwhelmed, even though no one was asking anything of me. I just, just, everything was too much. And so coming back from that and meeting with my therapist and her saying like, "how was your trip?" And me saying, "I was having a panic attack for two weeks, that's not okay. Right?" And she was like, "no, it's not." And me saying, "I'm thinking maybe the now is the time to try medication," and her saying, "cool, here's a referral, here's a referral to someone you can talk to." She referred me to a psychiatrist and the psychiatrist wanted like half my day to meet and I was like, "fuck that. I'll just go to the drop in clinic on campus and get, get a prescription there. They know what they're doing." Which like you know, that might work for you and it didn't for me the first time. I had to change meds. My new meds are amazing. Keep trying. You'll find the one for you.

Hannah (Host): [45:59](#)

Let's talk about that a little bit, because I have, I know a number of people who who have held out vis-a-vis the stigma of meds. So who have held off on, on starting them, and then there's a sense that like, when you have finally broken through that stigma and like, resolved to try medication that, god you want that first one to work. It's like, "I finally did it, this should fix me," but like, that's not how meds work. Like, you have to try, trial and error them and you have to like your first one might not-- and I know that that was a struggle for you to like figure out that that first one was not working. Are you, are you willing to talk a little bit about that process?

Marcelle: [46:42](#)

Definitely. I think maybe the best example of how the first one wasn't working is the fact that I couldn't, I just fell asleep every afternoon no matter what time of day I took it. I had insomnia at night and I would just like, pass out in the middle of the day. If I was even remotely close to a soft surface, I was asleep. And if I wasn't close to a soft surface, I needed to leave immediately and go directly to a soft surface and sleep. And, and the thing that went through my head, I'm kind of paraphrasing a friend of ours, our friend Todd. Blessed Todd, married to Claire. Both of them so good at talking about mental health. And Todd had

said, we were sort of talking about this, this inability to recognize side effects for your own just being a shitty person. And he was like, "yeah, sometimes I think like, 'Oh, if I wasn't such a piece of shit I'd be able to get out of bed or whatever.'" And I was like, "yeah, exactly!" That's exactly how I felt. Like there's nothing wrong with the medication that I'm taking because I, I've felt an improvement, but I'm just too much of a piece of shit to get out of bed. It was like, listen to what you're saying about yourself. You need different medication. Your medication isn't working the way that it's supposed to. But of course, because I had, sorry, I'm jumping ahead a little bit, but I stayed on that first medication for two months because I thought if I wasn't just such a piece of shit, then I'd be able to get out of bed. [Laughs] The medication is fine, it's me. That's the problem. So that was my summer essentially. It was like mid-July when I decided that it wasn't working anymore and I needed to try something else. And I was so scared of trying a new medication and losing another two months because I'm writing a Ph.D. I am way behind the time to completion that is expected of Ph.D. candidates. And so losing a summer that I had set aside to only work on my dissertation, it was my last summer of funding, and losing that summer to being bedridden because I decided to try medication for the first time just sucked. It was just, it was just a real bummer. And so I was really nervous. And I tried a new medication. It was great. So like I got it on the second try. If I hadn't been living with such severe depression for so long and had trusted myself that what I was experiencing was not acceptable, then maybe the side effects that I was having on the first meds, I might've recognized those, the side effects and not just remnants of my shittiness. My shitty nature just oozing out and not even this prescription medication can make me less shitty. I'm still just such a piece of shit. [Laughs] I'm being facetious. But those of you with depression, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Hannah (Host): [49:59](#) There's no medication for being a piece of shit. [Laughs] There's nothing can do about that. So, so to bring it back, to conclude and bring it back, sort of, full circle: is it easier or to parent now that you are not bedridden all the time?

Marcelle: [50:18](#) I would say that, yeah. Yeah. That was one of the first things that I noticed. That was one of the things that indicated to me that, that my medication, even the first one that had the horrible side effects, that it was working was that when Eliot came running into our bedroom in the morning and wanted to,, wanted me to get up and play with him, that I all of a sudden felt able to do that. That, that was like a really clear marker for me. One thing that I, that I really want to talk about maybe

before we go is that when I had recognized that I was depressed it felt really important to me to be as honest as possible with a two year old about that. And there were definitely conversations that I had to have with him about the fact that I was, that I was depressed and what that meant. And shout out to the end of time to my partner Trevor, who is and has been so good about being a true co-parent to somebody who has depression. Like, everybody deserves a co-parent, sorry, let me rephrase. All parents deserve co-parents. [Laughs] Like

Hannah (Host): [51:38](#) No. I demand a co-parent. [Laughs]

Marcelle: [51:38](#) No, everybody! Like, oh my god, all people deserve communities and partners who, who support them and hold them up, whether you have children or not. And Trevor did a really, really great job at not feeding into my sense that I was a shitty person for not being able to, to parent in the way that was, I guess expected of me or, or the way that I expected of myself. But it was actually, I want to say that it was, it was surprisingly easy to talk to Eliot about depression. And like little kids, they're intuitive, they understand feelings in sort of certain ways. They're complicated beings, as we all are. And so both Trevor and I would talk to Eliot about how I was, I was sick a lot and that I wasn't sick in my tummy, but I was feeling sick in my head, and that that meant that I didn't think that I could get out of bed. And that that meant that I didn't feel happy and I, and I couldn't do the things. I didn't have the energy to do things or, you know, whatever. And I wish I had it in front of me, but I had this two tweet thread, if you can call two tweets a thread, about this conversation that I had with Eliott about depression, and trying to explain to him that, "you know, you know, when you feel sick in your tummy? Well mama feels sick in her head. And so that means that, things that made me feel better, were staying in bed and TV," or something like that. And he said, "and kisses?" And I was like, "yeah, and kisses." And so the reason that I really want to talk about this, because when people have depression, or when people are living with depression and are parenting, there's a lot of, at least for me, there was a lot of feeling of "I'm not a good enough parent" or "I need to hide this from my child in case they think it's their fault." Eliot never thought it was his fault. Bless his sweet heart. It never even occurred to him that he might be, and he wasn't, but that he might be the reason why I was depressed. And so me explaining to him that I was sick and that my sickness was living in a different part of me. It didn't make me want to throw up, but it did make me want to cry and sleep. He was fine with that. He didn't, he didn't internalize that as like, he was bad or had done something wrong. And I think maybe it's made him, sort of,

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empathetic in a way that he might not have been otherwise. Like, like, sometimes when a friend is having a hard time and I need to go spend time with them because of whatever, whatever situation it is, I'll explain it to Eliot and say like, "Oh, you know, this person is feeling really sick and I'm going to go visit them," or "this person is feeling really sad and I'm going to go visit them so I'm not going to read you stories tonight." And he's like, "oh, okay." And so he's sad that I won't read them stories, but like he understands. He's, he understands that when you were sad or hurt or sick, you want someone to be there to love you. Like kids are, kids are amazing and they're resilient, and it's okay to have mental illness when you have kids. I think that that's the thing I want to leave your listeners with. [Laughs] It's okay to have mental illness when you have kids. It doesn't make you a bad parent or a bad person. Yeah. It's also, Oh, if I may?

- Hannah (Host): [55:01](#) Yeah.
- Marcelle: [55:01](#) It's also okay to have mental illness if you don't have kids.
- Hannah (Host): [55:06](#) Yay!
- Marcelle: [55:06](#) It doesn't make you a bad person, or a bad auntie, or a bad friend, or a bad partner, or a bad companion. We're all just doing our best, you know? [Music: "Postdoc Blues" by John K. Samson].
- Hannah (Host): [55:37](#) If you want more Marcelle in your life, you obviously should listen to *Witch, Please*, if you don't already, which you can find as ohwitchplease.ca. And then you should follow her on Twitter @Kosmin8r. That's K O S M A N, the number 8, the letter R. Kosman 8 r. It's funny You can find show notes and all the episodes of *Secret Feminist Agenda* on secretfeministagenda.com. You can follow me on Twitter @hkpmcgregor, and you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag #secretfeministagenda. Also, thanks to Amber JM for the lovely review. Be like Amber JM and support your podcasts by leaving them reviews on Apple Podcasts. Seriously folks, it makes a big difference. The podcast's 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. Marcelle's theme song was "Postdoc Blues" by John K. Samson. *Secret Feminist Agenda* is recorded on the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh first nations where I'm grateful to live and work. This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans]

