



Conscious Life presents

ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

Healing “Mother Hunger”

Guest: Kelly McDaniel

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[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of the Anxiety Super Conference. Today I'm speaking with Kelly McDaniel, a licensed professional counselor, author, mother and women's advocate.

In her first book, *Ready to Heal*, she named an attachment injury as Mother Hunger and started a movement. Women resonated with the concept and wanted treatment.

Kelly devotes herself to nurturing insecure attachment, maternal deprivation in adult women. In her second book, *Mother Hunger*, Kelly speaks to the millions of women who suffer with a lifelong emotional burden that adversely affects self-worth, eating patterns and relational wellness.

Kelly McDaniel, thank you so much for being with us today.

Kelly McDaniel

Thank you for having me, Meagen. And thank you for reading that so beautifully.

Meagen Gibson

So, Kelly, I would love it if you could start by explaining this term 'Mother Hunger', for anyone who hasn't had the pleasure of reading your book, and how it relates to anxiety.

Kelly McDaniel

So if anyone is listening or hearing this right now, the term 'Mother Hunger', if you have it, you know. Because the minute you hear that, there's a recognition in the body of, there's a name for this feeling. So Mother Hunger feels like a yearning and longing for a quality of love that somehow seems always out of reach, somehow intangible.

And before writing this book, I would not have even known how to operationalize that. What I know now from writing this book is that that feeling comes from inadequate nurturing, inadequate protection, and sometimes inadequate guidance during formative years.

So those things happen so young that they are embodied in places that are below our cognition, unconscious. And if we missed out on, let's say, specifically protection, the way we know that in adulthood is we're chronically anxious. So that's how it's connected to anxiety.

[00:02:24]

We can also have anxiety for other reasons. Anxiety does not just come from Mother Hunger, but there's a definite correlation.

Meagen Gibson

So if somebody does have Mother Hunger, chances are they probably also have anxiety.

Kelly McDaniel

If the type of Mother Hunger relates to lack of protection. So let me just be more clear about that. The reason I divided it into the three aspects, nurture, protect, guide, this is what mothers do. This is what mothers are designed to do, I should say. Our culture makes it almost impossible for mothers to do this and so that's another part of the topic.

But you can have a mom who was maybe very playful and affectionate and loving so you got some nurturing, but she herself was not safe in her home, perhaps, or like so many of us, carried anxiety from being sexual prey in our culture, so that you didn't always feel safe as a child and she could not protect you, perhaps from her partner or your siblings or when you had to go out into the world. That would lead to anxiety.

Let's say, on the other hand, though, you had a mother who was super protective and you really always felt safe, but she was not very affectionate. She was cold and therefore you missed out on some nurturing. Your symptoms are going to be pretty different.

You may not have a lot of anxiety, but you may crave food and eat in ways that leave you feeling mystified. You may crave sex as a substitute for what you really want is affection and touch, but it's hard to go ask for that. It's much easier to just be desirable, and then you get touched through sexuality.

So is this making sense?

Meagen Gibson

Yes, absolutely.

Kelly McDaniel

Depending on what you missed, nurture, protect, or guide, if you missed out on guidance, you might find that you really benefit from hiring a coach who can help you navigate being a woman.

If you missed all three, that's what I call third degree Mother Hunger and that, of course, includes huge amounts of anxiety, that's complex post traumatic stress. That's a separate topic. And I had to give it a separate name because, you can have a very loving, good mother and still have Mother Hunger, and you can also have an abusive mother and have third degree Mother Hunger.

[00:04:40] Meagen Gibson

And I love that you separated it out. Let me know if I'm taking this a step too far, but I feel like most people that have had a mother or had some sort of parent-child relationship, are suffering in one of those three areas of nurture, name them for me one more time.

Kelly McDaniel

Nurturance, protection or guidance.

Meagen Gibson

Nurturance, protection and guidance. So one of those three, because we're all imperfect humans, one of those three may be misattuned. And so there's some naming, identifying, and then healing work that's going to happen.

And one of the things that I love in your book is that you don't blame or demonize mothers, just admit everybody's humanity shortcomings, and that it's an understanding and an inside job that you're doing as a grown woman to heal and identify those parts.

Kelly McDaniel

Exactly. And I think it's hard to identify when we don't really even know what it is.

So I had been treating Mother Hunger for a while, but when I decided to sit down and write this book, I was at a loss. Okay, I know what I've been doing, but so much of the work I do is embodied. It's not necessarily cognitive.

So to operationalize what a mother does, I went to the dictionary. I thought I'll look up 'mothering', what is it? And the dictionary says it's to care for someone as a mother would, as if that's somehow innate and just a given.

So our culture makes it really hard for a mother to do this, for any parent to do this. So, yes, I think most of us have some form of Mother Hunger.

That's my bias, however. The science says, because Mother Hunger really is another name for insecure attachment, the science says 50% of us are securely attached.

Meagen Gibson

Both of us are like hum?

Kelly McDaniel

It just doesn't really line up with my experience.

But if that's true, 50% of us got adequate nurturing, protection and guidance somehow from someone. It doesn't have to come from a mom. It needs to come from a primary caregiver.

So we can think of Mother Hunger as a craving for those things rather than a craving for our specific mother.

[00:06:52] Meagen Gibson

Absolutely.

Kelly McDaniel

Anyway, so the rest of us out there on the spectrum of insecure attachment somewhere, yes, we will resonate with Mother Hunger.

Meagen Gibson

And obviously you named third degree Mother Hunger, which I know has a separate category and needs to be named because it is severe enough to need its own chapter and dialogue into how to address that. But sometimes, like you said, you can have, I always give the example of if you're a super athletic, super sporty person and your parents are very academic and not very coordinated, it's a mismatch of guidance and nurturance and celebration of who you are as an individual.

It doesn't mean that there was abuse or neglect, it's just a mismatch in that attunement and attachment that's going to make you feel, maybe insecure about who you are and your value in the world, but that wasn't on purpose by your mother, by your caretaker.

Kelly McDaniel

That's a great example. I think the guidance piece in particular, and I'll speak as a daughter because I write for daughters, we want to admire our mother. We want her to inspire us.

And some of the saddest stories I've heard, even though lack of guidance is maybe less profound as lack of nurturing and protection, those are much more primitive needs. And when we don't get those needs met before the age of 3, we really do suffer. Guidance comes later.

And it's hard for women when they realize my mother embarrassed me, or I never really wanted my friends to come be around my mother because she was so sad all the time. Lots of times our mothers didn't get the chance to develop who they were meant to be, and so we can't look to her for guidance. And that doesn't mean she didn't love us, it doesn't mean there's something wrong with us, but it is a loss.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And one of the things that you said in your book that literally stopped me in my tracks because I was walking and listening to it, and I just let it sink in, was you don't stop loving your mother, you stop loving yourself. So why is that true? Why do we do that?

Kelly McDaniel

We first learn what love feels like from our biological mother. So I say that because it begins in utero. When we are in her womb, we are falling in love with the sound of her voice, her smell, all of our needs are provided for.

And then when we're born, we expect that she will still provide for those needs, we expect to be in her arms, near her heartbeat which we've heard for 9 months, near her skin which we already love the smell, we can smell her milk, we're designed to respond to the sound of her voice, we're as little girls

looking for her eye contact. Little girls grow 400% in the social communication part of the brain in the first few months of life. And we do that by looking to our mother. We're in love.

[00:10:06]

Now if she is following mainstream guidance which says, feed that baby on a schedule, let that baby cry herself to sleep, we're going to suffer. Babies are not designed for that. Babies are designed to be attached to their first love.

If we are left to cry it out, if we are not fed when we're hungry, we're going to learn that something is wrong. Something is really wrong. That gets embedded in our nervous system as a death threat. Because when we're left alone and we have no cognitive reason or capacity to know why, we're totally dependent, our body thinks we're going to die and starts to down regulate the nervous system to prepare for death.

We're learning something's wrong with us or this would not be happening. And that's happening way before language. It's embodied deep in the nervous system and follows us through life and makes it hard to attach and love and trust.

Did I answer the question?

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And also I would say, and I think what you're talking around as well is, explicit versus implicit memory of like, you can develop these senses in your body and in your nervous system well before you can think, I'm sad my mom didn't respond to my cries or I'm sad she didn't feed me when I was hungry because it wasn't on her schedule.

You can't as a baby or even a young child, think your way through that. All you know is just an instinctual reaction to a lack of responsiveness and a lack of nurturance. And so your body remembers that and imparts in it, 'I'm the problem. I'm the thing that's not enough'.

Kelly McDaniel

Because it can't be the mother. Little ones literally cannot think that something is wrong with mom, because that would be too scary. So we make up, it's me, and then we do whatever we need to do as we grow up to adapt ourselves, to earn whatever we can from her.

I want to just say again, this is not about a mom failing because this is a whole systemic failure. This is ancient wisdom. This is nothing new that I'm saying, and yet our world has washed it away in service to industrialization, in service to medicalization, in service to, dare I say, patriarchy. Because if a woman's body needs to be available for a male, we certainly don't want to tie her up to a lot of breastfeeding and attuning to her infant.

So let's make it look like the infant doesn't really need anything. Let's tell mothers that you can sleep train and that child will adapt. Let's not tell a mom that what you're really doing is teaching that child that you're not available and you can't be trusted.

[00:13:06] Meagen Gibson

Also I have a ton of sympathy for modern mothers as well, because we don't have the support that we've traditionally had. Our family units are more separated than they've ever been before. I know when I had both of my children, my parents and my husband's parents were 2500 miles away, very far away. I was literally an island of mothering.

And so the decisions that we make are so influenced by our modern culture and what's expected of us. And we're lucky if we get a standard maternity leave, much less an extended one like I had the privilege of taking, which just meant extended unemployment was actually what my long maternity leave was.

Kelly McDaniel

That's exactly right. It's really a terrible bind that we have mothers in, in our culture here. It's a terrible bind.

And like you, I mothered in an island of solitude because my family was nowhere close, which actually, in hindsight was a good thing because the advice I got from my own mother was, put that baby down, why are you nursing so often? What I was able to do was pick and choose who could help me.

And I was so lucky to find a good midwife, to find volunteer lactation support that came to my home and sat with me until my child learned to nurse and I learned to sit still. I've never experienced such stillness.

So I did need support, I did need women, but I didn't necessarily need my own mother. And I think that's a tragedy because we do mostly need our mother when we become mothers. We need her again when we get married or we need her any rite of passage.

And I always tell mothers who are working with me who, they are healing their own Mother Hunger and they start to realize, oh, what did I do to my children? I always say, well, the good thing is, yes, your trauma may have transferred to your children, but so does your healing. And you don't have to explain it. They'll feel it. And daughters always want our mothers. We don't ever outgrow that need or that desire. We may not want the mother we have, but we always want a mother.

Meagen Gibson

I'm so glad that you named that because it's so true. And you don't even have to tell anyone you're doing the work. The healing transfers as well. Absolutely, 100%.

I haven't been with my mother entirely too long, but I can tell you that I have engaged that. And that is what gives me hope, because the decisions I made when my kids were really little are different than the decisions I make now. And all I can do is move forward with the knowledge I have right now.

Let me know if you experienced this, and it's not necessarily a stage of grief, but a stage of cycles of recognition. And I think that you maybe talked about this when you were talking about disenfranchised grief, in the stages of expectations that you have.

Like when you're little, your whole universe is your mother, and your dependency and need for them makes them extremely important. And then you grow up and you disentangle and become an adult

person, and then maybe you have children and you have a whole different resurgence of that need for your mother.

[00:16:36]

And if you haven't released those expectations or even consciously named them, that can be a whole sense of grief of like, I've not only lost my mother the first time or the mother I wanted, the way I wanted to be mothered, but now having a child and needing that support again, I'm feeling it all over again.

Kelly McDaniel

That's really well said. You got that from my book. I love it.

Disenfranchised grief, I might just untangle that for people listening, because I found the term, it's not my term, I found it so illuminating. Again, a name for something that we had not named before, and then it all fell into place.

But disenfranchised grief is grief with nowhere to go. So let's use cancer as an example. Cancer is well recognized as a problem. It's so well recognized that we have cancer support groups. So if you get this terrible diagnosis, you can go talk to others so you're not alone. You can get some guidance, here's what to expect from the treatment. And the grief can then flow because it has a home and name and recognition.

There has been none of this for Mother Hunger. So not only do we not know we have it because we didn't have a name, even once we name it it's like, well, now what? Because where do I go to talk about this? That's why I call it disenfranchised. There's grief here, but there's nowhere to put it, there's no way to talk about it, which makes it disenfranchised and that much more painful.

Incidentally now, the work I'm doing is to train therapists and coaches to run Mother Hunger groups because I am on a mission that this grief has a place to fall and doesn't stay frozen in the body. I think the essence of Mother Hunger is two things, shame and frozen grief, both of which produce anxiety, both of which need relational repair. They come from a relational injury, so they need relational repair.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I support that work, and I think that's fantastic. I can relate to that. I had a chronically ill parent growing up with my mother, and it was the kind of illness that nobody organizes races for. There's no color ribbon that people wear.

And I think of people who have incarcerated parents or parents with mental health issues, the kinds of things that carry all of this shame and stigma, that when people say, how's your mom doing? And you're just like, she's okay. It's the kind of thing that insulates you and separates you from others in the way that you don't feel like people don't know how to support you, even if you could name it and ask for it and you don't know how to say what's actually going on.

And so when you name disenfranchised grief, I was like, oh, yeah, that sounds right.

[00:19:42] Kelly McDaniel

That is a really great example of disenfranchised grief. There is no language for it so there's almost this cultural silencing, which I think makes shame grow.

Meagen Gibson

Yes.

Kelly McDaniel

And anxiety, because we feel anxious when we are isolated. We're not designed to be isolated, we are relational, connective beings. And when we have too much alone time, especially if it feels somehow non-elective alone time, isolation versus solitude. Solitude is nourishing, we choose it, it's great. Isolation feels like we've been caged away because something's wrong with us and there's nothing we can do about it, that creates anxiety.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely.

So I want to talk about how a lot of people that are walking this anxiety and trauma learning path have heard of fight or flight. And you call attention in your book to the sexual alarm system that many women develop and our propensity to befriend and tend instead, which can feel like such a contradictory response to what may be a potentially scary situation. So can you explain what that is and then why women in particular do that?

Kelly McDaniel

Yes, definitely. In 2000, Dr Shelley Taylor did the research on women's bodies instead of men's bodies. So the fight flight response, all that research was done on the male body. She started studying women and what women do when we are stressed. And she found a different stress response. She named it tend and befriend.

And what that actually looks like is grooming behavior, feeding behavior. Like when women get stressed, and I'll just use myself as an example. I do this when I'm anxious, I want to feed people. I want to cook.

And then befriend. We don't want to be alone with anxiety and with a threat, so we tend to grab our family members close or we call our friends.

Her theory is that this developed for survival because children depend on women for their survival, women didn't have the speed and strength of a man and couldn't necessarily leave their children behind to run so we bonded and grew closer in community for preservation.

So that makes a whole lot of sense. Where this gets really complicated, and I use this example in the book of an article called *When You Make Your Rapist Breakfast*. This is one of the most beautifully written pieces of journalism. The author talks about how this tend and befriend instinct can also sometimes save our life, even with the predator.

[00:22:27]

So if we are under attack, rather than fight, which could make the attack more painful, or run, which means they catch us and then they really hurt us, those are all unknowns. Those are unknowns. If maybe we soothe the predator, we make the predator feel good, we tend and befriend, in other words, we open our body and we just let it happen, maybe we won't die.

That's what the body is actually doing. That's not the conscious thought. But I get so frustrated when people go into victim blaming. Did you run? Did you say no? Did you try? Well, no, because those things are more threatening than to just give in and try not to die.

So our physiology is designed for no other reason other than to protect us, and that's what's happening with tending and befriending. It's protecting us, and it's protecting any children we may have.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I'm glad you named it that way.

And I'm sure, you let me know, but I'm sure when you contextualize it that way for a lot of women, it helps them make sense of why they didn't fight or why they didn't stand up for themselves more. And it's because your literal nervous system is all designed to keep you alive and to keep you out of danger. And so things like dissociation, perhaps, or surrender, those are not weaknesses. Those are sophisticated self-protection instincts in play to keep you alive and safe.

Kelly McDaniel

Exactly. Dissociation can be such a powerful way to survive a threat. And what's tragic is many of us learned that in the crib. If we weren't responded to, that's such a threat that that's when we first learned to disassociate.

So depending on how often it happened and the duration, dissociation could be how many of us are walking around in the world most of the time. So it comes in very handy when we're threatened, and then it becomes a liability when we're not, because it's hard to be present in our life when we have been so long in protection mode.

Meagen Gibson

And I'm thinking of a friend that has just in the last year come to terms with dissociation when she's not in danger. She was like, I finally realized I'm doing this as a pattern when it's not necessary, and trying to break those patterns and trying to, because it really is a pattern, like a neurological pattern that you're making when you fear or you're associating something with danger, regardless of how dangerous it is or not. If your body has decided this is going to put me at risk or make me vulnerable, too vulnerable, then I'm going to do what I used to always do, and that will keep me safe.

Kelly McDaniel

I'm so glad you said vulnerability, Meagen. And I'm going to use a personal story to illustrate why. I'm so glad you said that.

[00:25:37]

Sometimes when we've learned to dissociate, our body knows how to do that so well, that even something powerfully wonderful can feel like a threat. So here's an example.

When I gave birth to my son and I was nursing, the joy was, I had no words. I had never felt anything so amazing. I'd never felt love like that. I'd never felt the desire to be just protective, everything. I was just overwhelmed, and I dissociated because my body did not recognize these feelings. Even though they were wonderful, they were a threat.

And I didn't know this at the time, and in fact, when I was writing the *Mother Hunger* book, I've healed a lot of my own Mother Hunger with my mother so that wasn't difficult, but flashbacks to when my little one was little and I could feel the way my body would just shut down and go away. Even though I was there physically for him, emotionally I couldn't be. And that is such a sad nuance to be aware of that I was unable to stay present with such beautiful feelings of love and joy because they were foreign.

So I just want to share that as well, that, yes, we will dissociate during a threat, but we might dissociate during joy.

Meagen Gibson

Because really it's about overwhelm.

Kelly McDaniel

We're overwhelmed. The anxiety is just too much.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely.

Kelly McDaniel

And the body does what it knows how to do, which is check out.

Meagen Gibson

Exactly. And so once you can name it as, I'm overwhelmed, how can I integrate this experience? How can I name these emotions? How can I...

Kelly McDaniel

Be with them.

Meagen Gibson

Be with them, exactly. And not endure, it's the wrong word, but be present with discomfort.

[00:27:35] Kelly McDaniel

Or with joy.

Meagen Gibson

I meant joy and discomfort in this situation.

Kelly McDaniel

That phrase that we hear so often, "I'm literally beside myself with joy" or whatever, is so true. We literally step out and we're beside ourselves. So the call is to manage the anxiety so we can stay in our own skin. And that is impossible if we don't know what's happening.

Meagen Gibson

And did we explicitly name what dissociation is? I can't remember if we've actually said this is what the experience of dissociating feels like.

Kelly McDaniel

Well, I talk about it in the book using someone else's words because she said it so beautifully. She said, dissociation doesn't really hurt. It's kind of nice. It's almost like being in a trance. What hurts is coming back.

I thought that was the best explanation I've ever heard, because while we're dissociated, a lot of times we're not feeling much and we're not real conscious. We don't even really know. I can be dissociating while I'm eating and being a food trance and not really be tasting the food, not really be enjoying what's happening in my body. I have to come back, be mindful and say, oh, look at this beautiful salad or whatever.

The coming back is what sometimes hurts because we come back into our own reality, which may or may not be a reality we like or we've chosen or we've created. Many of us as women are just doing what the culture tells us to do. And so when we come back into our reality and realize, I don't think I would have made these choices if I knew I had them, that's hard to be with, and that's the part that's hard.

Meagen Gibson

It's a really great explanation. I love that.

I want to definitely touch on pathological hope because I've definitely had to come to terms with this myself and it seems like such a root cause of unexplained anxiety in family relationships. So I'd love it if you could touch on that for a minute.

Kelly McDaniel

Pathological hope. Yes. Thank you for bringing that up. It's one of my favorite topics as well. Another name for it could be fantasy.

So let's go back to the example of when we're little and we cannot know that mom is not perfect. We have to think she's perfect because our survival is dependent on it. So we see her as perfect. She is

perfect. Well, that's a fantasy. Unless, of course, she is, which I guess there are those out there, I don't know.

[00:30:14]

So we learn to fantasize as children, so it wouldn't be too difficult then to carry that capacity into our adult relationships, whether they're romantic and we have a fantasy of what that partner is going to be or do for us. And then we're just so bewildered and shocked when it doesn't happen.

Or we continue to think as adults when we return home, for whatever reason, whether that's a weekly Sunday meal or that's a holiday once a year, we think or hope it's going to be different this time. She's going to talk to me. She's going to tell me she's proud of me. Whatever the hope is that we have, we still have.

And that becomes pathological because it gets in the way of us seeing who we are and who our mother is so that we can adjust our expectations and adjust our choices. Maybe we don't go home as often. Maybe we take a friend. We just lose our choice when we get stuck in pathological hope.

I call it pathological because healthy hope is inspiring and keeps us motivated and keeps us going, and we need it. And I love it. And that's great hope. Pathological hope is fantasy. It's not real. It's not going to happen. And it keeps us stuck in these patterns that we end up hurting ourselves over and over again with disappointment, heartbreak.

And until we can see our part in it, that we just keep going back with this unrealistic hope, it's hard to change it. We can't wait for somebody else to change so that we feel better.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And I think you said even in the book that the real mistake is that you think it's about you, but it actually has nothing to do with you. It's all about the other person.

And that's really the core that I found, of why it hurt so much, is because you do want it to be about you. You want it to finally be about you.

These are all fictional examples, but I'm going to walk in the door and my mother's not going to comment on my weight, the first thing she sees me. She's going to encourage my career choices and see why they're so meaningful to me, even if they weren't her vision for my future. Or she's going to champion the partner that I have because she's finally going to see what I see in them.

All of these pathological hopes that are just never going to happen because that's asking your mother to be a different person, to be the person that you have to biologically assume that she can be, she will be, the thing that I know in my heart would be a good mother.

Kelly McDaniel

Exactly. And I think another reason we want it to be personal, another reason I would want it to be about me is, because if it is, then I can fix that. If it's not, then I'm truly at a loss. I have no power to change the situation. And that is a terrible thing to come up against.

[00:33:12]

So I think part of pathological hope is our own need to think, I could fix this, I could really adjust myself, and then my mother will finally love me. I'll get it right. That's a lot easier to work with and sit with than to think it doesn't matter what I do, I'm never going to have that love.

Meagen Gibson

Yes.

Kelly McDaniel

That's hard.

Meagen Gibson

And that is really, for me, the definition of anxiety is trying to control that which is out of your control.

Kelly McDaniel

Exactly. That is the definition of anxiety.

Meagen Gibson

To me anyway. I haven't looked it up.

Kelly McDaniel

I love that. I think that should be the definition of anxiety.

Meagen Gibson

And so in keeping that hope in the way that we've described it, it's you trying to control something and someone that is just totally out of your control. And the illusion of you changing will be enough to change their reactions and behaviors towards you, it's just again setting yourself up for hurt.

Kelly McDaniel

Especially when there's been a proven pattern. And I think that one of the things that protects us from knowing that we're not being nurtured or protected or guided, is a concept from Jennifer Freyd that is, Betrayal Blindness.

We are literally blind to maltreatment because it is a betrayal. And if we knew that when we're little and we're helpless, independent, and we can't go anywhere, we're stuck there, our body protects us from knowing it because it would be too intolerable.

So that protective mechanism follows us into adulthood and we may find ourselves in relationships that feel very familiar, the betrayal feels very familiar, we're blind, we don't see it coming, because that's our body and how it's learned.

[00:35:09] Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And the other thing that I think when you say that also, is that we value positivity and optimism so much to the point where a lot of times in family systems, if you point something out, everyone's going to argue against you, not necessarily to the point of gaslighting, but they're going to, that toxic positivity of trying to sugarcoat it.

She doesn't support your career, but she sacrificed everything for you when you were growing up. She worked extra jobs to put you into sports or she stayed up all night sewing your dance rehearsal costumes or whatever the situation. It's the 'yeah buts' you're going to hear from your relatives and from friends and family. They're going to yab at you into thinking that you're the one that didn't deserve what it is that you're trying to get. And it's hard.

Kelly McDaniel

I think that plays right into the disenfranchised grief, don't you?

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, absolutely.

Kelly McDaniel

There's nowhere to go to talk about how you feel about your mom.

Meagen Gibson

Which is why we need those groups.

Kelly McDaniel

We do. Because I think there's such a loyalty bind anyway. We all want to be good daughters, sons. And to say anything negative feels like such, like we're the ones being the betrayer. So, I think that's another reason the grief gets frozen.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely.

Kelly McDaniel

Nowhere to go.

Meagen Gibson

Well, we've done a really great job of naming all the problems. What I would love now is, you described several ways in the book of self-healing, calming techniques, things like that. So I would love it if you could share one with us today that we could start today.

Kelly McDaniel

Okay. One of my favorites, and thank you for that question. I love that question. One of my favorites is what I call a celestial mother.

[00:37:06]

So I actually came up with that term in my first book, *Ready to Heal*, because that book was about helping women break out of addictive love patterns. And so much of addiction is treated with the twelve steps. And step two in the twelve step model is about a higher power. And for a lot of folks, that's a traditional God-like figure. That wasn't helping my clients. All my clients had Mother Hunger before I even knew the term.

Anyway, so I came up with let's create a celestial mother, the mother you wish you had, who is watching out for you, she is divinely interested in your life and orchestrating the best for you. What does she look like? What does she smell like? What does she sound like? Can you draw her? Can you hear her? If you can't, are you willing to try?

So this is an exercise I do with my clients, and it has helped me personally, is to take all that amazing capacity for fantasy and use it to create a celestial mother. That is a positive channeling for what our body knows how to do because we've had to do it our whole life, which is fantasize.

So create this mother, the one you wish you had, the one you long for, and embed her in your nervous system. Which can help by at night, when you're getting ready to go to sleep, you picture her, lay hands over your eyes, you don't even have to touch your eyes, just kind of a reiki, energetic. And imagine what she wants for you.

Imagine the happiness she wants for you, the joy she wants for you, the abundance she wants for you. She's not jealous of you. She's really happy to see you smile. And she's delighted that you're her daughter.

Meagen Gibson

I love that exercise, too, because... I got so warm hearted that I actually forgot what I was going to ask you.

Kelly McDaniel

That's so good. That means you're limbic right now.

Meagen Gibson

I do remember now, back in my rational brain. It was the framing of, "and if you can't, are you willing to try?". Because I know from my own experience in therapy and working with talented people like yourself, is that if your needs have been disregarded, asking someone to come up with a safe figure sometimes can make you just draw a total blank. You are at a loss, a complete and total loss for even imagining what your own needs might be.

Kelly McDaniel

Or how safety might feel.

Meagen Gibson

How safety might feel.

[00:40:00]

And so to say, are you willing to try? It's just such an invitation. I get that this is difficult. You're going to try anyway even in the most minute amount.

The first thing that came to mind is somebody with really crinkly eyes from smiling a lot, from experiencing a lot of life. Like little crinkly eyes. The eyes were the first part of my celestial being. Yours might be totally different. I'm not trying to fill people's brains with my ideology. I'm just saying, "Are you willing to try?". It's such a wonderful framing.

And you get to choose and it works. You get to choose. I imagine somebody laying in their bed, their hands over their eyes, and telling the celestial being what their day was like and then imagining the celebration and the receiving of that information with just total love and acceptance and championing and delighting in what you're saying. You can do that for yourself.

Kelly McDaniel

I love the image of the crinkly eyes, and I love that eyes are what came to you because the eyes are what little baby girls are looking for first with their mother. They want that eye contact. We need that eye contact.

But back to safety. Just real quick. I want to just interject this. Many of us never even knew the feeling of safety in the womb, so asking to come up with a celestial mother to help feel safe can really be foreign. And I've seen this time and time again.

So I was really thrilled when I found some research, and this is in the book, which talks about there are about 4 or 5 weeks from the time the egg meets the sperm and we are beginning to be, before we are attached to our mother's placenta.

Meagen Gibson

In the egg yolk.

Kelly McDaniel

There you go. In the egg yolk. We're in a little yolk and we're not yet attached to her anxiety or her emotions of any kind. So sometimes we try to imagine what that might have felt like to just be in the yolk to float in utter safety.

Meagen Gibson

Go all the way back to the beginning.

Kelly McDaniel

All the way back.

Meagen Gibson

Kelly McDaniel, this has been fantastic. How can people find out more about you and your work?

[00:42:38] Kelly McDaniel

Well, I would encourage anyone who's finding this compelling to consider my [website](#). You can sign up for my newsletter. I don't send them out very often because I personally don't like things cluttering my inbox. I only send out a newsletter if I've got something really good to share.

Obviously buy the book if that sounds good. If you don't like to read or if reading is, reading has been hard for all of us during COVID because we're carrying this kind of anxiety so it's hard to have attention, the audiobook is really helpful.

Also if you are someone who struggles a lot with anxiety I would encourage the audiobook because when you read you hear your own voice or your mother's, but if you listen, you'll hear mine. And I've gotten some feedback that that's helping a lot of women digest the material. When they were trying to read, they would just have to put the book down. They just couldn't do it.

And on Instagram I'm [@kellymcdanieltherapy](#) on Instagram and I am enjoying feedback there from people that have read the book and I share things from the book or upcoming opportunities to work with me or train.

Meagen Gibson

Fantastic. Thanks again for being with us today.

Kelly McDaniel

Thank you for having me.