



EPISODE 75: SEX, STRESS & GRATITUDE WITH EMILY NAGOSKI

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Maggie

Hello everyone and welcome to The Marriage Life Coach podcast. You all know I love every episode, and every guest and every day is a special day. But if the podcast was a movie, this would be Oscar night.

Having our guest on today is actually a dream come true for me. Her book changed my life -- both my personal life and has had an enormous impact on how I Coach my clients. She's a personal hero of mine. And while I know we're gonna have a very rich, deep, fun conversation, I just want everyone listening to know -- in my brain, I will be fangirling the entire time. You just fangirl along with me.

My super amazing guest today is Emily Nagoski. I could introduce her as the superhero of sex and burnout, and just leave it at that. But I want you to know her official intro so here it is. Emily Nagoski is the award winning author of The New York Times best selling *Come as You Are*. And *The Come as You Are Workbook*. That was the first book that changed my life that I read and loved.

She is also the co-author with her sister, Amelia, of the New York Times bestseller, *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*, which is the second book that when I read also changed my life. She earned an MS in Counseling and a PhD in Health Behavior from Indiana University with clinical and research training at the Kinsey Institute.

She combines sex education, stress education to teach women how to live with confidence and joy inside their bodies. She lives in Massachusetts with two dogs, a cat and a fabulous cartoonist who we will absolutely discuss during this episode. And it's not in her official bio, but





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she also writes romance novels. And I have read both of them and they are awesome. Welcome, Emily.

Emily Nagoski

So fun to be here. My cat Shelly has joined us also. I don't know if you can see her ears. She's rubbing herself against the microphone. Oh, and she just put spit all over the microphone. So that's fun. She's 15. We let her do anything she wants.

Maggie

Her name is Shelly. Yeah. So Shelly is now the official mascot of The Marriage Life Coach Podcast. She can do anything she wants the whole time. Okay, so I was thinking about what to talk about today. And I feel like we could talk for a week. But since we only have an hour, I picked some things.

And I just want to walk you through what I'm thinking of talking about. And as we go through it, we'll just cover what we cover. And we'll see where that leads us. But I thought it would be good and I'm just gonna tell you -- I like to, I used to do corporate training. So I like to tell the listeners what we're going to talk about. And then we talked about it and then we told them.

Emily Nagoski

Yes. Exactly, yeah.

Maggie

Yeah. So we're gonna talk about the role of stress in your sex life. And we're gonna start with Come as You Are, which was the first book that Emily wrote that I read. So we're gonna talk





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about something that she calls -- she calls processing emotions going through a tunnel. And I don't know if you wrote this in the book, or if I just took it and made it my own, but I call it tunneling now.

Emily Nagoski

No, that's you. That's smart. That's good.

Maggie

Okay. So we're gonna talk about tunneling with Emily, who created the idea, but now I teach all my clients about this. We're going to talk a little bit about spontaneous desire and responsive desire and accelerators and brakes.

So those are things that I think everyone needs to go out and buy these two books, like, we're just going to scratch the surface of what Emily has brought to the world and our understanding of sex and stress. But these things I think, are really great for you just to get a feel for what's important.

And then she wrote this amazing book called Burnout. And this book talks about so many aspects of stress that I don't think anyone has understood in this way until you put it together the way that you did. And one of the things that I get chills even just thinking about talking about it, is the idea of having a stress and a stressor, and really making a mental distinction between those two things.

So everyone listening, we're gonna tell you exactly what we mean by that. It's just if you haven't heard this before -- if you're not in one of my classes and you haven't heard this before -- it's





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gonna blow your mind. And if you wonder if you're in one of my classes, you will know how special this moment is to talk about this with the author.

Okay, then we're gonna talk about human giver syndrome, which in this podcast, we're a marriage podcast that is about rethinking what marriage can be for women. And really, it's about the emotional liberation of women, right? It's like, in the construct of marriage where we used to be property, now it's like, we're gonna own it, we're gonna lead it, we're gonna make it what we want. So human giver syndrome is like, definitely...

Emily Nagoski

And that's where we're going to talk about how amazing my husband is.

Maggie

There you go, I love it. And then also, you have this really fascinating approach to gratitude. And in personal development, we talked about gratitude all the time. But the way that you approach it and the evidence based information that you share, I thought was so powerful for something that we all think we know what it is, but we don't truly and I really feel, Emily, that, that's what you've done with sex and stress.

We all think we know what those things are. And you've opened my mind and the mind of so many millions of people who have bought your books. It's like, wait, there's a deeper, richer place here. And I really want you to understand what it is.

And I'm just so grateful that you've done that. And you've done that in a way that's approachable. When I recommend these books, I tell people there are these really deep topics,





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but they're so fun to read, you're gonna love them. So thank you for doing that.

Emily Nagoski

And that's literally with gratitude. I thought I knew what it was. And I hated it. So I went and read the research. And I was like, "Oh, that's completely wrong about what I thought -- how I thought gratitude works." And it turns out, it's great.

Maggie

Yes, and now we love it. And that's how many women feel about sex, Emily. So let's help them.

Emily Nagoski

Let's do that.

Maggie

Let's do that. So one of the things you start Come as You Are with is the importance of processing emotions, in order to feel free and open and available to enjoy sex. So can you tell us a little bit about this idea of walking through a tunnel with a feeling?

Emily Nagoski

Right, so, my standard metaphor that my students literally would roll their eyes when I said it, I said it so often, is that feelings are tunnels. You have to go all the way through the darkness to get to the light at the end. Which, in another way, I call it completing the cycle.

That we are built to go through cycles of emotions. They have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Feelings are not inherently dangerous in any way. What's dangerous is getting stuck in the





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middle -- not allowing ourselves to move through. And let me be clear, I was raised in a family that did not teach me that feelings were tunnels.

They taught me that feelings were caves, with bats and rats and a river of poison. And if you go into that feeling, you will be trapped there forever. So it was when I learned the science. And I was like, "Oh, no, if you let your body do the process, if you trust your body to go through it, it will just end on its own."

It was miraculous. And then I taught it to my sister. I have an identical twin sister named Amelia, who learned this lesson from our family even better than I did. So much so that she got stuck in the middle of so much emotion that it poisoned her body, and she ended up in the hospital twice.

So I taught her how to complete stress response cycles, because her body was stuck in the middle, especially of so much rage. As women we get taught that anger is not acceptable for us. And she had all this rage trapped in her body, and it was physically poisoning her because stress, all emotions, are physiological responses.

They don't just sort of happen as psychological ideas. They are physiological responses that change our chemistry in every organ. And it shut down parts of my sister's digestive system. To be holding on to all the physiological changes that happened to her body when she was angry.

And she had to learn how to be comfortable releasing the anger, moving through it, separating the feeling of being angry from the feeling of fear of her own anger. So that she wasn't afraid to let the feeling happen in her body, that it's not dangerous, that it's not scary, that it is





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acceptable to have feelings happen in her body. And she says that it saved her life, which is why we wrote Burnout.

So the way I learned it, much earlier than she did, is through mindfulness practice. And mindfulness is like gratitude. Where everybody says that it's good for you, and you're like, "Ugh, mindfulness." But if you start out with sort of gentle small emotions. Like I noticed right now that I am feeling gently calm, and I just allow that to be true. And I just notice what happens, it will continue.

And I got up to things like crying about frustrations over small stuff going wrong. And the thing about crying is that it's a great way to allow emotion to move through you. If you -- this is that separation of the stress from the stressor -- you stop thinking about whatever it was that caused the distress, and you just notice sort of what's happening.

Like what does your face -- what temperature is your face? What fluids are oozing out of you, right? Like what tension is there in your muscles? Where? How does your digestion feel? You stop paying attention to what causes the stress and you just notice the experience of it in your body and you allow it to release and it just ends on its own. Like you get all the way through the difficult part to the light at the end, and you feel better.

So even though I got raised in a family where they told me crying doesn't solve anything. I mean, it's true that it doesn't deal with the stressor -- whatever caused the distress. It does make you feel better enough to be able to deal with it yourself.

Maggie





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Yes, that's so good. So here's the analogy that I use for feelings. I want to see what you think. I think about feelings like water. It's like the ocean. It's like a wave. When waters flowing, it is healthy and life-giving.

When water gets stuck and stagnates, it is literally deadly, right? And if we think about letting feelings flow versus having a feeling get stuck and stagnant and then it starts smelling bad, it's like everything about it. It just gets like putrid. Like it's just bad. The flow is where you find everything.

Emily Nagoski

Yes. There's actually -- my very favorite Rumi poem -- because obviously, as a middle class white lady, I find a lot of wisdom in a medieval Sufi poet. But the English translation of this poem is when water gets caught in habitual whirlpools, dig away out through the bottom to the ocean.

So when there's a wall between you, and like, the ability to complete the cycle to move through that wall. Sometimes in the darkest distress, like you stop trying to beat down the wall. The wall is too high. So you allow yourself -- this is how I think of depression -- is you let yourself sink down into it. You surrender to it, you allow yourself to drop out through the bottom and you find yourself safe.

It takes so much trust in your body and the wisdom of your own heart, to allow yourself not to like flail and panic and try not to drown. You let yourself sink down into your own experience. So rather than it just being a tunnel, it's also this like vortex and if you soften and allow yourself to drop through it, you just have to trust that it will happen.





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Maggie

And the more that you trust with the simpler emotions -- I love how you said that, I say similar things too. It's like, with the simpler feelings that feel more manageable and doable, practice building that trust muscle, just practice building it, and then that emotion that feels overwhelming when it comes along, that trust muscle will be stronger. And even though you haven't gone down that vortex with that particular feeling because you've done it with 10 others, it's like okay, I will not die if I allow this.

Emily Nagoski

Yes. And it literally can feel like it could kill you. That's how my sister felt, is that I cannot feel those feelings. Because if I dare to feel an emotion that big, it will drown me.

Maggie

Yes. And so creating safety around feeling any feeling will help you then have more safety around feeling that very challenging feeling, feeling.

Emily Nagoski

Yes. And it applies both to emotional experiences and to physical sensations. So I mean, because I talk about sexuality a lot -- like when people struggle with orgasm. That's a big sensation, when when it goes well. And when people struggle with orgasm, it's often because like a really big sensation is building inside their body. And they start to panic. Like, this is too big. I don't feel in control.

You start to criticize and judge yourself. Like, what if I don't have an orgasm this time? What if I do have an orgasm this time? What if? What if, what if I am having an orgasm? I don't





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even know it. And all those thoughts are just like keeping you trapped in the middle. Instead of surrendering and allowing yourself and body to do it.

It's weird how like, my sister's experience with rage and helping people with orgasm are really similar language because feelings are feelings. Whether they're like enjoyable for you or not.

Maggie

Yes, I also think about them as colors like purple, green, red, blue. Because we would never say, "Oh, never shall I ever have red in my life ever again." Which is what we try to do with feeling sometimes. We might say I don't like red. I'm not gonna buy a red sofa. But if I see red down the street, I'm not gonna fall down crying either, right?

So it's like when you start removing that association that we have -- that a feeling is this overwhelming thing. It's like, oh what if it's red and purple and you like some more than others. And some are annoying, but you just deal with them. And it's a different thing. Yeah.

Emily Nagoski

Yep. They're all important. They all serve a function.

Maggie

Yeah, I love that. So feeling a feeling all the way through is like going through this tunnel. So I read the book. And then when I read the book, in the Coach training that I did, we have a concept called buffering, which is where we avoid a feeling and then we avoid a feeling and we do stuff. Like we'll watch Netflix for five hours. But there's nothing wrong with watching Netflix for five hours. It's only not useful when we're avoiding a feeling.





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Emily Nagoski

Yeah, it's the only way you have of coping instead of feeling a feeling. Because there are some feelings that are -- they're too big to like, it's exhausting to feel that feeling all the time. Like if you are mourning, if you are overwhelmed with like caring for a dying parent, like, those are huge emotions, and it's exhausting.

And sometimes you need to pause. With the recognition that you are just pausing. Like when you come, you're resting. Which we are not designed to stay in a state of intense emotion all the time. We just get worn out. We need to oscillate from experience into rest.

And sometimes just checking out and watching *Pride and Prejudice* or whatever is your crack. For me, it's like the new *Bridgerton* for my brain. There's a series called *everything's gonna be okay* on Freeform and Hulu, about an older half brother, who becomes the guardian of his two teenage half sisters, one of whom is on the autism spectrum. And it is delightful. And like when I need to go live in a world that is not the world I live in, I want -- I just want to go be there.

Maggie

Yes, I love that. When I need to have a moment where I live in the world that is not the world I live in, it's okay to visit another world. We're just not going to move there.

Emily Nagoski

Right. Yeah.

Maggie





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Yeah. So good. So for everyone listening, tunneling, feeling the feeling the whole way through, buffering, avoiding a feeling. The actual activity that you're engaging in could be very similar for both. And we just want to just know that we want to tunnel or go through that vortex to the other side as often as we can, as we're able, when we are able.

Emily Nagoski

I think of it as like a marathon or, like a century 100 mile bike ride. They always have places to stop for water and food.

Maggie

Yes. That's so good.

Emily Nagoski

Sometimes you need to stop. It doesn't matter if it slows you down. If you need to stop for water and food -- if you don't stop for water and food, bad things can happen.

Maggie

Exactly. And that's one of the things I talk about a lot in so many different contexts is slowing down to speed up. Stopping for water and food is what will get you all the way to the end of the race. Like slowing down to notice how you're feeling, to notice a sensation, to create safety around feeling a big emotion. All of those things require us to slow down. And yet they create results in our life much faster. It's very paradoxically sexy.

Okay, let's talk about spontaneous desire and responsive desire. Because when I read that, it just felt like everything clicked into place. It was like, "Oh, this makes so much sense." So thank





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you for bringing that sort of to the masses, right? And sharing that. And so tell us a little bit how you explain it. Because I always say, I learned this from Emily Nagoski. Here's how I explain it. But you're here now, so you explain it now.

Emily Nagoski

I'll just explain it the way I explain it. So most of us are used to the narrative of sexual desire that is spontaneous. It just appears out of the blue. Like you're walking down the street, you see a sexy person, you think a stray sexy thought.

And Erica Moheim, who is the cartoonist who illustrated *Come as You Are* and the workbook, she draws a webcomic called, *Oh, Joy Sex Toy*, and she draws spontaneous desire as a lightning bolt to the genitals.

Kaboom. You just, you just want sex out of the blue when you go to your marital euphemism. And you're like, "Hello person I have kaboom. Do you have kaboom? Should we kaboom together?" And that absolutely is a normal healthy way to experience desire. But it's only one of the ways to experience desire.

There's also responsive desire, which shows up in a couple of different ways in long term relationships. Sometimes it's you're like scrolling through Netflix, trying to find something to watch and your certain special someone is like, like, touching you in nice ways and saying nice things and your brain receives that stimulation and is like, "Huh, that's really nice."

And then maybe you like start like seeing things back and touching back and maybe kissing back and your brain receives all that stimulation and is like, "You know what? That's not just





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nice. That is kaboom.”

Maggie
Yes.

Emily Nagoski

So where spontaneous desire emerges in anticipation of pleasure, responsive desire emerges in response to pleasure, and that is just as normal and healthy as spontaneous desire. The way it can actually show up in long term relationships is not so much about the like scrolling through Netflix, sometimes it happens that way.

But sometimes it is like sex night or date sex where like, you're like Saturday at three o'clock. Whatever happens -- you and me in the red underwear. We're going to do this thing. And so you arrange the childcare if you need to, and you cordoned off space and time on your calendar and you show up in red underwear, and you put your body in the bed, you let your skin touch your partner's skin.

And your body goes, “All right. I really like this person, I really enjoy this.” And that is responsive desire. And in fact, in couples who sustain a strong sexual connection over the decades, that's the most typical narrative of how they have great sex.

And the couples who have the best sex, put the most homework in. They put effort into like setting a stage, preparing their bodies, and the setting, and the room where they're going to have the sex, and the mental state that they're in when they walk in the door. They don't just like walk in with still thinking about the kids and the laundry, and the dishes, and their job, and all





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the body shame and sexual shame that they grew up with. Like they shed that stuff.

Maggie
Yes.

Emily Nagoski

And when they walk in the door, they leave it behind. They close the door, and all that's present in the room with them, is what they want to bring with them into the bed.

Maggie

Yes, that is so brilliant, Emily Nagoski. And one of the things that I've seen where women feel guilt or shame, or like, something's wrong with them -- is this cultural narratives that we have, like the throw me against the door, take me now, right?

And I started thinking about this one day because it comes up. I'm a Marriage Coach, I Coach women who struggle sometimes with feeling like they want to want sex, right? They want to want it but they don't. And we have to unpack a bunch of things around that.

Sometimes -- and we'll talk about it we get to burnout -- It's being the human giver syndrome, which we'll talk about in a minute, which is we're so exhausted. Who wants sex when you're exhausted? No one. Right? That's one thing.

Emily Nagoski
Almost no one.





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Maggie

Right? And then, if we think about our popular culture, or the messages we receive in the media. Movies, TV, to certain degree books, but now we have the whole romance novel genre that's written by women.

But if we think about what we see when we're growing up, we see a depiction of men writers, men directors, men producers, men executives approving movies, TV shows, whatever. Up to now -- we're recording this in 2021. When I was growing up, I'm 47 years old, this is what I saw. And we saw a lot of depictions of spontaneous desire. And not as many depictions or the normalization of responsive desire. Do you have any thoughts about that?

Emily Nagoski

Yeah. I'm 44 so I have a very similar experience. And I think, really, it has to do with the excitement of spontaneous desire. Like how exciting of a movie is it to watch a couple spend an entire week, texting each other about like, how they want to arrange the curtain around their bed to make sure that it's silent, and whose job it is to make sure the kids are out of the house by XYZ.

And like, timing the laundry so that it's done, and the dishes are done. Like that's not. That's not like a thrilling narrative. It is a thrilling narrative to like, be you running away from the bad guy and hiding in a closet, and you like, have sex in the closet, because you're like --

When I was actually at a romance writers conference, overheard in the elevator, all these characters are like running away from the mob, and they're being shot at and they're hiding in a little narrow alleyway, and they have sex in the alleyway.





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And I can't even have sex if there's still a dish in the sink. Like, it's an exciting story, and I don't criticize the stories -- the stories are fun and exciting. But the stories that are fun and exciting, is not representative of what makes a great sex life for a couple over four decades.

Maggie

Yeah. And I think it's just important to say that out loud explicitly to people over and over and over again. Like nothing is wrong with you. We are humans, we are not movies. And that's a good thing.

Emily Nagoski

Right? So learning how to have sex from romance novels or even pornography is like learning how to do anything for -- I especially compared to learning about sex from porn, or from romance novels is like learning how to drive from watching NASCAR.

Maggie

Oh, that's good.

Emily Nagoski

Yeah. Like those are professionals on a closed course with a pit crew. Like it takes a team. Yes, yes. And if you try to like actually make that work in your real life, you're gonna find that there are some problems.

So instead, you learn to do it from actual real life, the people who wait -- in the research, who have a great sex life over the long term, shed everything they ever thought they knew about how





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bodies, sex, safety, love, and trust work. And they tune in to what their own bodies are saying. And they tune in to what their partners are saying, and pay attention to what works for them.

They shed all the scripts, you've been taught about what we're supposed to do. There's like the script of what order our behaviors are supposed to go and which behaviors are acceptable and which are unacceptable, and how our bodies -- like we have to wait until our bodies are the right shape and size before we're allowed to experience sexual pleasure.

In reality, there is no script, you're allowed to do anything you want. And the body you have right now has 100% full permission to experience all the pleasure that is available to it. Right now. Without changing anything.

Maggie

I love it. Yes, co-signed. Okay. On that note, let's talk about accelerators and brakes. Because that's another thing where, once people know, once I knew I had accelerators and brakes, I immediately was like, "Oh, that's totally accelerator. That's totally a brake." Yeah. Tell us tell us a little bit about that.

Emily Nagoski

So this is the dual control model of sexual response. And the simple version is that, you know, it's called the dual control mechanism, because there are two parts.

And the first is a sexual accelerator, or the gas pedal, which notices all the sex related stimuli -- everything you see, hear, smell, touch, taste, or crucially, anything that you think believe or imagine that your brain codes as sex related, it sends the turn on signal that many of us are





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familiar with. It's functioning at a low level, all the time including right now -- we are talking about sex, it's a little bit sex related. So there's a little bit of sex related, go signal being sent.

At the same time in parallel, your brakes are noticing all the good reasons not to be turned on. Everything that you see, hear, smell, touch, taste, think, believe or imagine that your brain codes as a potential threat, and it sends the turn off signal. So your level of arousal is this balance of how much the ons are turned on, and how much the offs are turned off.

Usually, when people are struggling, it's not because there's not enough stimulation to the accelerator. It's because there's too much stimulation to the brake. Which is why it's -- because we all sort of like the typical steps or good advice from where I learned about sex, which is women's magazines, Cosmo, and glamour, telling me to like try handcuffs and lingerie and watch porn and roll. And those are great if you like them, go for it.

But when people are struggling, it's usually not that we need more stimulation to the accelerator. It's that we need to get rid of stuff that's hitting the brake. There's a brake. It's important that there's a brake. It serves a really valuable necessary function of preventing sexual interest from taking over at a time of stress, when other things really need to be our priority.

Unfortunately, our lives, oh, man, they provide a whole lot of stuff to hit the brakes. And that's our daily life stuff like our stress, overwhelm, exhaustion, parenting stuff, like that's a totally different state of mind to be in. To be in like parent mode versus being in a hot, sexy state of mind. And then there's like all the cultural stuff of body shame and sexual shame.





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And if you were raised in a religion that taught you your sexuality was unwelcome in so many contexts. And now you suddenly find yourself married and like it's supposedly okay, but how do you unlearn like, your whole life, it was not okay. And now suddenly, it's okay. Like, it doesn't just switch like a light switch, you got to help your brain recognize that this is no longer a threat. This is not fun to hit the brakes anymore.

So there's -- most of the time when people are struggling, the answer is not to add stimulation to the accelerator. It's to notice what's hitting the brakes and get rid of that stuff. The dishes, the laundry, the children, the noises that you're afraid are gonna like wake somebody up or distract somebody and cause someone to knock on the door.

I talked to a woman who, she lived in Europe and her family -- she, her husband, and her three kids would go on vacation to the same town every year. They would rent the same house, the same vacation house. And for years, they had like really great vacation sex in this house. And then one year they couldn't get that same house and that great vacation sex didn't happen in this other house.

And they were like, why? What was going on? Because they had this sex but she was just like, lost in her head, lost in her thoughts. Why was it different? And what they realized is that their first house was so old that the bed was actually built into the wall.

Which means it was silent, it made no noise, which means there was no risk of waking up the kids and getting that like knock on the door. "Hey, what's going on?" So the next year, obviously, they rented that same house, they planned early. And then when they built their own house, they built the bed into the wall in the primary bedroom.





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Maggie

Love it, things that are that simple...

Emily Nagoski

Right? I mean, building a house is not simple...

Maggie

But noticing what it was right? Noticing all of this really helps me and then creating a situation where as soon as I can do that, as soon as I can help myself in this way, I won't just do it on vacation. I'll also do it at home.

Emily Nagoski

Yeah. And not judging. She didn't go into this whole like, but it shouldn't bother me. I shouldn't worry about whether or not the kids are going to hear and interrupt us. She just recognized that this is what's going on, so let's create a context where that's not hitting my brake.

The same thing goes for like, if you're distracted by grit on the sheets, you know what? Change the sheets. My favorite example is if your feet are cold, like literally just like physically, your feet are cold. It's enough of a distraction from the pleasure happening elsewhere in your body. You know what? Put on socks.

Maggie

Yeah. So simple. Okay, there's gonna be like a new rule. I'll be like, if your feet are cold, put on socks.





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Emily Nagoski

I told this to a friend and she was like, really? Because her feet would get cold. Yeah, but the thing is, she realized her partner really likes that sort of thigh high kind of look. So she got wool thigh high stockings. So she was super warm. And her partner got like the sexy look of a thigh high.

Maggie

Love it. And what I love about that also is what's sexy to each person is going to be different.

Emily Nagoski

Totally different. Some people -- the ankle sock is the really sexy sock.

Maggie

Exactly. One of my friends told me once to put on a French maid costume and welcome my husband home and I burst into laughter and I said if I ever did that, he'd be like, "Is it Halloween? Are you trying on your costume? What's going on?"

And this is like -- I hope it's okay that I share this -- but my husband really likes like, the mountain girl look. Like plaid. Like if I were plaid and jeans, like all bets are off, right? Like if I wear a French dress, it's like nothing, but like nothing will happen.

Emily Nagoski

Yeah, everybody's different and like it's all okay. There's actually a lesbian couple I follow on Instagram, Jessica Kellgren-Fozard and her wife. And they're lesbians, so they're both women,





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but one of them dresses -- Jessica dresses like vintage 1950s hair makeup, fluffy skirts, with petticoats and everything.

And her wife, Claudia, is quite a tomboy. And when they tried swapping clothes, they're like, I really prefer seeing you dress the other way. And I really prefer like, I feel really uncomfortable dressed this way.

So what they found attractive is the opposite of what they themselves wanted to wear, even though they're both cisgender women, like what they feel comfortable dressing in, and what they were attracted to were not the same.

And that's like totally acceptable and okay. And like if you like seeing your partner dressed up as like, you know, in the garden in their rubber boots and pitchfork.

Maggie
Go with it.

Emily Nagoski
Yeah. And if you love like a fluffy dress and like full makeup with big arched eyebrows like great.

Maggie
Love it. What's the name of their account so we can follow them?

Emily Nagoski
Jessica Kellgren-Fozard. They're -- at the time that we're recording this -- they're about to go





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on maternity leave, because Claudia's pregnant. They're about to have a baby. I can't wait.

Maggie

Congratulations. Congratulations already. So we'll put it in the show notes too, for anyone who wants to follow them. Okay, so accelerators and brakes everyone. Now you know. Now you can go figure out what they are and start working with them working with both.

Emily Nagoski

Yeah. Another thing I will just add about Jessica and Claudia is that Jessica has some different chronic illnesses and disabilities that she has to deal with and it's a great example of how you just like sort of incorporate..

This is Shelley, my 15 year old cat. Remember from her from the beginning? She's back. Again, 15. She can do anything she wants to. Here she is on my shoulder digging her claws into my skin.

One of the things we learn from people who have great sex lives over multiple decades, that whole like till death do you part in sickness and in health thing? Like your body's gonna change. Your partner's body is going to change. Like its abilities are going to change. Your cardiovascular functioning is going to change. And that does not mean your sex life is gone.

It means you adjust and adapt your sex life based on what your different abilities are. And that's normal and healthy. I have a vestibular disorder, so my balance is terrible. Oh cat! And, like I'm so sensitive to motion that an elevator can make motion sick.

And it took years after my diagnosis for me to recognize that this was impacting our sex life,





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because there's some like movement and bouncing involved in sex. And I finally recognized like, oh, the reason I feel dizzy during sex is my vestibular disorder. And so we change the way we organize like, like, what position I'm in and how much control I have over the motion.

Maggie

Yes.

Emily Nagoski

So that I don't feel dizzy and nauseous from sex. Like, it was so good. Just and if we decided, "Emily has a vestibular disorder, we can't have sex anymore." Like we're only 44. Like that would be -- no.

Maggie

That would be a no.

Emily Nagoski

We still have more sex to have in our lives.

Maggie

I love that you mentioned that. It's so good. You adjust to it, is something so important for everyone to remember. And I talk a lot about all or nothing thinking because so many of us have in so many different ways.

And we have it when it comes to sex, where it's like, "Oh, this thing happened, then I can't have any," versus, "This thing happened. What is the middle way? What can we do? What is available





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to us?” Just adjusting to it.

Emily Nagoski

What’s available to us that we would never have thought of if we hadn’t been forced to be more creative?

Maggie

Yes. Oh, good. So when we think about sex, what happened to me I think is indicative of what happened to everyone who read *Come as You Are*. As we were fascinated by all the sex stuff, and then we were completely enthralled and like mesmerized by all the stress stuff. We’re like, “Wait, stress has such a huge impact on my sex life? I had no idea. Tell me everything about all the stress stuff,” right?

Emily Nagoski

That’s literally the origin story of *Burnout*. Because it came out in 2015. And I spent six months traveling all over talking to anyone who would listen about the science of sexuality. And people come to my talks and come up to me afterwards and be like, “Yeah, all that sex stuff is great -- responsive desire. Thanks for that. But you know, what really made a difference in everything? Was that one chapter about stress and emotion processing.”

And I told this to my sister, who is a choral conductor who was like, “Yeah, remember, remember that time I was hospitalized, and you taught me that stuff. And it, you know, saved my life? Twice.” And that’s, that’s when I was like, so we should write a book about that. And it was October of 2015, we decided to write *Burnout*.





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Maggie

Yeah. So thank you for writing that book on behalf of everyone, just like on behalf of the planet. Thank you. And here's what happened -- when I read the first book, before the second book had come out -- because I work with a lot of type A women have a lot of responsibilities and have a lot of stuff going on. We talked about stress all the time.

And I coined a term that I now teach my students, which is compound stress syndrome. And the way that I do it -- I'm going to show it to show it to you because I have a board here -- is you open a stress cycle. So just imagine that I'm drawing, for everyone listening, an open stress cycle. You open all of them, but we don't have bears and lions and things.

We have the text from the mother in law, the school lunch that is late, your partner's boss is aggravating again, we have the email we haven't returned. And this hasn't happened in a day or in a week or in a month. This was at three o'clock. So we have all these open stress cycles that we haven't closed, and then we wonder why we're overwhelmed. And what's going on?

Emily Nagoski

I love that. Because this is everyone's question, right? Like I'm walking around with all of these incomplete stress response cycles. Is there any hope for me?

Maggie

Yeah, yeah. So first, every woman I have ever shown this to had your reaction, which was like, "Oh, my God, it makes so much sense." And so the stress is now compounded, right? One stress on top of another, that's unresolved.





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And literally, I have to say this exists, because your book exists. Because I was reading *Come as You Are* and I was like, wait, all of this goes together? How does this all go together? What am I seeing? And this is literally what I saw. And so then I tell my clients, our job is to complete the cycles.

Emily Nagoski

Yes. And that's exactly -- that visual makes it so clear why it's important to separate dealing with the stressors, from dealing with the stress itself. Because the same behavior can deal with all of that stress all at once. But each of those stressors has it's own separate solution.

Maggie

Yes. Okay. Yeah. Let's talk about the stress versus the stressor. Because when I read this, again, it was one of those mind blowing moments. And I was like, "Oh, that makes so much sense." So to give an example, let's say I get an email that requires me to respond and requires work for me to happen.

And that opens up a stress cycle, and maybe I'm in a fight response. Like I don't want to do this work. It's too much, whatever is going on, right? And one of the things I need to do is respond to the email. But the other thing I need to do, which I learned directly from Emily through her book, was I need to tell my body it is safe again.

And sometimes, and I can say when I worked in corporate -- like now I run my own business and I have, I manage stress differently. But when I worked in corporate and had a lot of external stressors sort of coming at me, I would respond to the email, but I would never deal with telling my body it's okay and it's safe again. It would never cross my mind. Nor did I have any notion





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that that was something that had to be done.

Which is why when I read it in your book, I was like, wait a minute, hold on, how do we not all know this? Why do we learn -- Yeah, how do we? Why do they teach us like geometry and parallelograms and not teach us how to create, you know, complete cycles?

Emily Nagoski

Never once have I needed to know about parallelograms.

Maggie

I'm 47, I have a mortgage and a business. Never once have I needed that information, right? So that's the basics of what I understood about the stress and the stressor. But tell us anything you want to tell us Emily because it's all so important.

Emily Nagoski

Yeah. So this I love this, like compound stress, because it addresses exactly the difficulty so many women have of having like, just a million roles are supposed to play a million sources of stress and a feeling of total overwhelm, and exhaustion. And so much like stress management -- sorry, my cat is she's, she's decided that the anchor for the microphone is hers. And so she's rubbing her face to get her juice on it. That's she's --

Maggie

You love it.





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Emily Nagoski

So, a lot of stress education, stress management is about stressor management. It's about time management, and like calendar skills, and communication skills, and those things are super important. But they don't help you.

You get done at the end of the day, and you've checked everything off your strategy, clear your list, and you still feel like your shoulders are trying to be your earrings and you are frustrated and irritable. And your partner approaches you for sex. And you're like, "Are you kidding me? No!"

Why? You crossed everything off your list, and all you want to do is relax, which is the advice my sister got when she was hospitalized. And they couldn't diagnose everything, even though her white blood cell count was through the roof. They were just like you did stress you need to go home and relax.

Okay, so as your compound stress image shows like, you can't just shut things off, you have to help your body go through the complete cycle, you have to assist your body. Not like just saying, like, you have to tell your body that you're so safe.

But the one thing that doesn't work to complete the stress response saying is telling your body, "You're safe now, you're safe now." Because your body's like, "Prove it, girl."

Maggie

Yes. Prove it to me.





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Emily Nagoski

For me, the way you prove it is with these like many there's a dozen evidence based strategies for completing the stress response cycle, which shifts your body chemistry in a way that shows your body "Look, you have gotten out of this dangerous, potentially life threatening situation and returned to a place of safety. So your body is now a safe place for you to be."

The most obvious one is physical activity, because when you're running away from a lion, what do you do? You run. So when you get home with a terrible commute (back when we had commutes), right?

So like you're like exhausted and overwhelmed, and so frustrated, and you get out of the car, do you when you finally deal with a stressor, which is making it home. Do you suddenly feel relaxed and pleased with your life? And you're so glad? No, you still feel like "Argh," when you walk in the door and you take it out on the first mammal you see

Maggie

Love it. You take it out on the first mammal you see.

Emily Nagoski

Like it's usually a dog for me when I get home. So the deal is just because you've dealt with a stressor, doesn't mean you've dealt with a stress in your body. So when you get out of the car or you get off the bus, you need to move your body in a way that's like look, you are free now. You have escaped. If that's like the walk from the bus stop, great. If it is standing outside your car, doing jumping jacks, great.





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Anything that purges all the chemistry of the stress response cycle. Or if it's going for a walk around the block before you walk into the house, and deliberately like shaking out your limbs and telling yourself, "Shake out the terrible commute. Shake out the difficult workday." So that when you walk in the door, your body knows that it is a safe place for you to be now. So when you walk in the door, you are a safe place for your family to be.

Physical activity is not available to everyone for any number of reasons. Some people just are not natural exercisers. Amelia, my sister and the co-author of *Burnout*, is a COVID long hauler. So she now has chronic fatigue and exercise is not a thing for people with chronic fatigue. Her body is always working so hard to heal her that if she tries to exercise, she's just in bed for three days.

Fortunately, there are many, many other strategies for completing the stress response cycle, like a creative self expression when therapists recommend journaling. I'm sure you talk about journaling, all the time.

It is not about the construction of sentences that matters, right? It's about finding a safe place to put all those feelings where they're not going to do any harm to your body or to anyone else's body. You just put them all in there, and you close the book, and they're out of your body so that you don't have to deal with -- the stress is no longer in your body. And you've maybe made a little progress toward dealing with the stressors.

There's also connection, which can be like the 20 second hug is one of the favorites, right? The six second kiss. But it doesn't have to be with another human being. It can also be rough and tumble play with your kids or with your spouse or rough and tumble play during sex. Highly





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recommend.

It can also be connection with pets, or other animals. Connection with nature, like as a landscape. For some people, if they're at the beach, that's a place where their body just shifts or the mountains or the desert. Like everyone has a different -- for some people it's a cityscape. Whatever landscape makes you feel like, "Oh, I'm in a safe place now."

For me, it's the beach. Or it can be connection with the divine. Many people experience their connection with God as being held by a loving family. And that does the same thing in your brain and body is being held in like a physical mammalian family.

Maggie

Yes, so good. So there are so many ways to complete stress cycles. In the book, there is list...

Emily Nagoski

And it's just chapter one.

Maggie

You have all these things right there so you can refer back to them. And something else I have found just like with sex, and what we find sexy, is it'll be different things for different people and different things at different times and in different contexts. Right?

Emily Nagoski

Like exercise used to be better for Amelia. Not available now. Fortunately, there's other stuff she can do.





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Maggie

Exactly. Sometimes you want a hug and sometimes you want to do 10 jumping jacks.

Emily Nagoski

Yeah. Sometimes a hug will drive you through the roof.

Maggie

Exactly. So it's different. Different moments in time, different people, different situations and different chapters of your life. And it's kind of like we have to slow down enough to see "Oh, how am I feeling now? Do I feel back to center? Do I feel safe? Do I feel good?"

And check in and allow a spirit of messy experimentation with all of it, which I talk about a lot because my listeners are type A women where messy experimentation is like a stressor. What? You're telling me to be messy on purpose?

Emily Nagoski

I just want it to work. Tell me what works. Tell me what to do.

Maggie

Yes. Exactly. So we're telling you what to do. And part of it is being messy. You'll get an A plus for being messy. How's that?

Emily Nagoski

And the thing is, the only expert in this is your own body. Like I can't tell you what -- I mean, I





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can tell you things, but your body is the one that's going to be like yes, this is for me. No, this is not for me. And the more you can trust and listen to your body, the better off you'll be. Yeah, Amelia is making a whole -- we have a podcast called The Feminist Survival Project. And we have an episode on like how to listen to your body. But people have so many questions about this.

It's so difficult for so many people. We have since -- Amelia, since the publication of Burnout has been diagnosed with autism and alexithymia. She is terrible at listening to her body, which kind of explains how her body got so trapped in her stress that she ended up in the hospital because she was just like not hearing her body's signals.

So she's making a sort of like, beginner's guide to listening to your body. From the point of view of someone who has been so terrible at it, they were hospitalized. And who has since had like a sister with a PhD in public health, who teaches other people about stress, like here is how I learned to apply this stuff in my actual life.

So if anybody listening is like, "Listen to my body, What? What? What is..? That bullshit. Just tell me what to do." No, I'm telling you, your body is the one who's the expert. And if you cannot hear your body, that's the thing that happens, especially to women, we get trained not to trust our own bodies, to believe other people's opinions about our bodies more than we believe our own bodies.

And so if you need help with that, the Feminist Survival Project, Amelia is doing a how to listen to your body sub-series specifically because of that issue.





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Maggie

Yeah. So we'll link to that for sure in the show notes. Absolutely. And then that's amazing, but a beautiful resource. Thank you.

Emily Nagoski

And it's because, like, I would be the wrong person to teach that because I've always had like this, like strong connection. My body communicates really clearly with me. And again, we're identical twins.

Maggie

Right.

Emily Nagoski

How could it be that we are so different in this? And it's just like people vary so much.

Maggie

And can you say what alexithymia is? Because I don't know what it is. And one of the things I want to do on this podcast is just tell people these things exist on earth.

Emily Nagoski

Yeah, so alexithymia breaks down to not having words for sensations, basically. And it means that the way Amelia receives information about her body sensations, her interoception -- like the feelings in her digestive system, the feelings in her muscles -- is blocked. She gets a very small amount of information, she can't pay attention to that information.





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And she definitely cannot translate that information into something she can describe or do something about. She has to pause and deliberately pay close attention. Like she had a sensation somewhere in her abdomen. And she had to sit still and listen for 10 minutes to figure out, did she have food poisoning?

Oh, no, it was menstrual cramps. Like it was like, it's like she has to focus really carefully, and get really quiet and listen carefully to what's going on in order to interpret like -- a sensation is happening, but what does it mean? What is it?

Maggie

I love this so much, because I think this must be a very under-diagnosed thing that so many people have, because when I'm Coaching, we talk about the feelings you feel in your body, and what is the sensation attached to it.

And some people will use very concrete terms. And some people will use very precise, like sensation based terms. And so just in the very unscientific case study of the people that I personally know, a lot of people have this and don't even know it.

Emily Nagoski

Yes. And my first encounter with it was with a student of mine, who was struggling simultaneously with an active eating disorder and alcohol abuse. And so we were talking about how she was using alcohol to like, mute her feelings because she couldn't cope with them.

And so I was just trying to like, establish a really simple to like, first this than that, then that happens with a stress response like you have -- you notice a threat, your body responds with a





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sensation. And then what do you do with that sensation?

So I did the very simple. So you see a lion coming for you? What happens to your body? Silence. Nothing, no intuition about what would happen to her body if she were experiencing a life threat.

Maggie

For everyone listening, just imagine the lion coming to you. And if you feel like it's a little bit of a disconnect of like, well, I don't even know what I would -- what sensation it would be, then you're not alone. And it's okay.

Emily Nagoski

And if Amelia can learn it, literally anyone can.

Maggie

Yeah. And it's just a matter of sort of, like so many things on our planet in our universe are set up for a certain type of person, right? And this is just like, wait, we come in an infinite variety of types and styles. And just because we didn't know that this was a thing doesn't mean millions of people might not have it. I mean, I have no idea but I'm guessing.

Emily Nagoski

Yeah, it's remarkably common. And the fact that Amelia and I are identical twins and have deeply different experiences shows that it can be anybody.

Maggie

Yeah. I love it. So I was planning on talking a little bit about human giver syndrome and





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gratitude, but I want to check in with Emily cuz she's a very busy, in demand person.

Emily Nagoski

No, I totally want to talk about those two things. They're so important.

Maggie

Yeah. Is it okay, if we go over a little bit?

Emily Nagoski

Yeah, yeah.

Maggie

Okay.

Emily Nagoski

I have a thing at one.

Maggie

Perfect. Okay, so we're going to talk about this thing. So, human giver syndrome. Tell us everything.

Emily Nagoski

So Amelia, and I invented this term based on a book that we read by Kate Manne, called Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny. She is a moral philosopher. So she posits a world where there are two kinds of humans. There are human beings who, you can tell by the name, have a moral





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obligation to be their full humanity -- to be as competitive, acquisitive, and entitled as they need to be to maximize their full humanity.

And then there are the human givers who have, you can tell by the name, a moral obligation to give their full humanity to if that means their time, their attention, their patients, their smiles, their bodies, their hopes and dreams. Sometimes their lives are sacrificed on the altar of other people's comfort and convenience. So I mean, if you had to guess just at a population level, which one are the women?

Maggie

If you had to guess. Let's see.

Emily Nagoski

And of course, like, it's just that like, if you're born in a body that makes the adults around you go, "It's a girl!" then this is the sort of user's manual they hand you is the Human Giver User's Manual. And if you're born in a body that makes everybody go, "It's a boy!" and you're given the Human Being User's Manual, that does not mean that you will inevitably grow up to be one or the other.

For example, I am married to a dude. And so is Amelia. And both of them are natural human givers. And the dynamic in our relationships is entirely different than if it were a human giver, human being relationship where the human being feels entitled to have anything that the giver gives. And the more the giver gives, the more human being feels entitled to have whatever serves them, and the more their giver feels obliged to continue giving.





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And here's the thing -- is if you just continue giving and giving and giving, then eventually you have nothing left and you start to get resentful. But the thing is, you're not allowed to feel resentful, because how dare you as a human giver.

So Amelia and I made up this syndrome that we call human giver syndrome, that says, women in particular have a moral obligation to be pretty, happy, calm, generous, and unfailingly attentive to the needs of others. And because this is a moral obligation, if we fall short, in any given moment of these five standards, then we deserve to be punished.

And if there's no one around to punish us, for failing to be pretty, happy, calm, generous and attentive to the needs of others, we'll just go ahead and beat the crap out of ourselves. And yeah, that's the poison right there is believing -- because if we're supposed to be going through the tunnel and completing the stress response cycle, if we dare to take time to stop dealing with everyone else's problems, and deal with our own stress? Like how selfish. How dare you? How dare you?

Maggie

100% this is what I Coach on, right? Every day all the time. It's like, "Oh, I need to learn to say no, but how dare I say no. Can I say no? Do I have permission to say no? What happens if I say no?"

Emily Nagoski

That advice makes me so frustrated, like you just need to learn to say no. No. Other people need not to punish you for saying no.

Maggie





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Yes, exactly. It's like, okay, where's my no, where's my Yes. I also call it like, recalibrating your yes and your no. Like, wait, what is my real yes, that I actually want to do? What is my real no? How many nos that I'm giving are fake.

So yeah, one of the things that I teach is like no pretending. Like marriages will suffer when we're pretending inside of them. And they will flourish when we are like being at truth inside of them. And when we remove pretending as an option, our yeses, and nos become really clear. But we still have to process the guilt and the social conditioning.

Emily Nagoski

Right. And our partner stuff, like it's an adjustment for them to get used to, I'm saying no to this. And they're like, "Hey, but..." and they have all these feelings about the fact that you're now defending a boundary. And they have to learn the skill of being like, "Oh, they said no. Good. We're done. That was the end of the conversation."

Maggie

Exactly. And we have to learn to allow the discomfort of seeing our partner have discomfort.

Emily Nagoski

Because how much -- how often does it happen that we say no, and our partner pushes, like, "No, but it's just one thing. And I really need to..."

Or in the workplace and you say no, and they're like, "Oh, but let's just have a meeting about it." Or, "It's just a small thing," or "I'm really busy too." And, "Can you help me with the blah, blah, blah," and like, the pushing, and eventually it takes more energy to defend your no than to just





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do the thing you don't want to do.

Maggie

Yeah, so we don't do that here.

Emily Nagoski

And what change in your energy it makes when you can just say no, and the other person's like, cool.

Maggie

Yes. And it requires like a retraining or recalibration, renegotiating of how we relate to each other.

Emily Nagoski

Yes. Both people have to be grownups.

Maggie

Yeah. How about that? Right? Yeah. And sometimes when one of the people isn't, you have to decide, do we want to deal with a teenager when we say no, and every decision is okay, but you have to take it on knowing that's the choice you're making.

Emily Nagoski

And some people are so teachable, and ready to learn. Some people are relieved to have this language to understand what this dynamic is. Because they know their partner is like accommodating them in some ways that cause like, and they like they want to understand what





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the dynamic isn't, and be able to tell the difference between a yes, that's like a true enthusiastic, "Yes, I want to be there for you." Versus a yes that's like, "Ugh. Fine."

Maggie

And what I find -- and this is kind of one of my things is, we're not all married to jerks, right? Like we say we have this human hubris syndrome thing going on, we have a lot of resentment that can build. And when we start making changes and shifts, what we find is most of our partners rise to greet us. Like most of our partners are like, "Oh, yes, this feels so much better. I love your yes now."

Emily Nagoski

Yeah, and sometimes, they don't just rise to greet us, they buoy us up to get to a place. Because as a human giver, it's really hard to ask for help.

Maggie

Yes.

Emily Nagoski

And sometimes your partner's, like, "Let me help. I want to help. Let me help." And you're like, "No, I have to do it myself. I have to do it all on my own. I'm a failure if I don't do all the things." And your partner's, like, "If you don't let me help, you're going to crash and burn and then I'm gonna have to deal with the consequences anyway. So let me help."

Maggie

Yes. So good.





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Emily Nagoski

Welcome to my marriage, by the way.

Maggie

And this is the part where we get to say wonderful things about your husband. Perfect transition. He is so kind, he was part of us coordinating our talk today and I was just telling Emily. He is so kind. And I am so grateful for his kindness.

Emily Nagoski

Yes, I have abandoned all hope of being able to keep up with my email. Email is very exhausting for me. And there's, there's like 100 emails a day. It's literally not manageable for one person to give like thoughtful responses to every email that deserves a thoughtful response.

And so my husband saw the ways that I was just drowning, because it's hard to be able to do that and also do my actual job. And he was like, "Let me help. It doesn't suck for me the way it sucks for you to do email. I don't have feelings about your email, the way you have feelings about your email." And so I surrendered my email to him.

Maggie

What a great decision. The Marriage Life Coach approves.

Emily Nagoski

It was hard. And there are still times when I'm like, "I'm using up -- I am wasting so much of your time on my stuff." But he's like, "Which of us makes more money?" I do. So like, we're still working





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on like, I also grew up really poor, like on food stamps poor, and money I'm sure it's always a conversation in every marriage but like I have feelings about the money part.

So we're still sort of working on that. But that's just like this like frosting layer over the cake of I have help. That he is there for me in the technical sense. So Sue Johnson, the relationship therapist and researcher defines trust as: are you there for me? Emotionally accessible, emotionally responsive, and emotionally engaged.

And he is there for me. I can trust him. Like when I am struggling, he'll help me and also in public health, we talk about social support coming in four different flavors. There's instrumental support, where if a person is hungry, you just give them some food. And sometimes all I need is emotional support for him to like, be there for me while I cry and stuff.

But sometimes I just need instrumental support. Like I just need more fingers typing responses to emails, and he can offer instrumental support with almost no cost to him but his time. And it was harder for me to accept the help than it was for him either to offer it or give it.

Maggie

Yeah. So here's what happens to me -- was when I went on my honeymoon, my husband offered to take my bag. And I said, "No, no, no, I carry my own bag. I can carry this bag. And if I can carry it, then I should carry it."

And my husband who is like this super chill -- he's an engineer, very linear, you know, kind of person. Very logical. He's like, "But it's heavy for you. And it isn't for me." And that was one of the most profound things he has ever said. He's like, "You don't understand. It's heavy for you. And





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for me, I carry it like it's your purse. It's nothing for me."

Emily Nagoski

Exactly. Email is heavy for me. And it is light for him. And why don't I just let him do it?

Maggie

Yeah. So thank you for letting him do it. Because here we are.

Emily Nagoski

And he is. He's delightful. He's like, so charming and sweet. And everybody makes friends with him first. Like he's, I'm so and I'm sure there are people listening who are like, "I wish my fucking husband would carry my bags and help me with my email and offer to help and be like, it's more work for me to watch you struggle than it is for me to do the thing."

Maggie

Yeah. And so sometimes what we need to do when that happens -- if you're one of those people thinking that -- is we need to just check what else is going on. Just like accelerators and brakes for sex, there's accelerators and brakes for relationships.

And there might be a brake in there where he might be super willing, or she might be super willing to do that. But we need to check if there's an accelerator and brake energy going on there. And then once we check, if they're not willing, then we want to know that data to that data is also important. Then we decide what to do with that data.

Emily Nagoski





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To fill in the blanks of the kinds of support, though, so there's instrumental support where it's just like I just need help doing the thing. There's emotional support, where I just need you to be there for me while I process this feeling. Because sometimes in that hole, like going through the tunnel thing, like it can be really scary and big.

And it's so helpful either to have someone at the end of the tunnel saying, "I see you, I'm here for you, I'll be here for you when you get to the end." And sometimes it's so difficult and dangerous and dark that we need someone to come sit with us in the middle of the darkness and be like, "When you are ready, we will take a step and each step we take together is a step toward the light," when it's really difficult.

So that's emotional support. Then there's informational support, where it's just like there's a thing, I don't know that you know, can you just teach me? I don't know how to cook eggs. Can you just teach me how to cook eggs, right?

And then there is appraisal support, which is the most complicated one, because it's information about your characteristics that are making this difficult for you. Which I, like my therapist is allowed to give me appraisal support. And my sister and my husband, and that's it.

My mother, though I love and respect her, is not allowed to give me appraisal support because it feels too close to criticism. It is like if you have any difficulty with the other three, wait for appraisal support until you're really good at the other three.

Maggie

Yeah, I love that guidance. And appraisal support sounds like something similar to what we do





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in Coaching in the sense that we come at it with so much love. Like unconditional love for the human we're talking to and we also, from a place of love, will ask really difficult questions.

In a condition where there's been permission given, where it's for a purpose, where we both want the same goal (which is for the person to create whatever the result is that's happening). And that appraisal support is coming from this place of and if you know this, and can now see this about yourself, then you can have authority over it and what to do about it. Not from a place of, "I'm blaming you for having this quality."

Emily Nagoski

It can be so much more difficult within a marriage, right? Because sometimes there is a conflict of interest. It's like, "are you giving this information to help me understand me better so that I can be my best self? Or is it because you need me to change and be different because I'm failing to meet a need for you?"

Maggie

Exactly, yeah.

Emily Nagoski

And like, that's legitimate, like if you're married, and this is the only person you're going to be married to. And that person needs to show up for you in a particular way. Like it's reasonable to be like, "Here's something I need from you that you're not providing. Let's talk about how we can help you meet this need for me." But you got to do it with so much love.

Maggie





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And one of the things I say is: how can we get this need met? Whether it's you or something else, or somebody else? What is the best way for this need to be addressed? And sometimes a lot of the things I see people get really stuck in is they want their partner to be good at something that their partner is actually bad at and will never be good at. And they get stuck in the cycle. Like it can last for years sometimes.

I'm like, okay, this person is just never gonna do that. They don't it doesn't mean they don't love you. They just are not good at that. And the example that I give is a trapeze. Imagine if the only way I could show that I loved you was to do a trapeze act in the sky.

I'm a 47 year old, relatively out of shape woman, like I love you more than life Emily, but I can't do the trapeze act for you. That's not gonna happen. But I am showing you in all these different ways, "Oh, I do care. I do care. I do care." And sometimes we tune those out. And we're like, "Oh, no, but they didn't do the trapeze."

So I talk about that in an episode called Rethinking the Five Love Languages. So we'll link to that in the show notes.

Emily Nagoski

Oh I'm so glad you did that, because that book makes me a little crazy.

Maggie

Oh, yeah. So the basic hypothesis is people sometimes can use them as weapons instead of tools. And so I did a whole episode where I lay that out. And I think of the trapeze example.

And it's like, we can use it as a tool for awareness to understand that this is something that we prefer.





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But this does not mean this is the death of our relationship, because I've had people come to me for Coaching, where some good natured situation occurred, where they said, "Oh, this is your love language, and now you're doomed."

And I don't subscribe to that at all. So we have to rethink them. They can be used tools and appropriate moments, they can be useful, but never, never do we use them as weapons.

Emily Nagoski

Yeah, another recommendation of like a media thing I follow is By the Book. It's a podcast of two women who will read a self help book and then live by the advice of that book for two weeks and see what happens. And they lived by The Five Love Languages. They liked it more than I did.

But for me, in particular, the fact that it shows up over and over again, like one of the hosts learned that the way her husband really loves to receive love is by public acts of service. Like let me do a thing for you. Let's do a thing together out in the world. And she's like this very strong introvert with chronic illness and she does not want to go out into the world.

But like doing incredibly small things that are real hard for her, and not intuitive, makes such a profound impact. So I really like that it guides us toward remembering that things that don't come intuitively to us -- if we can remind ourselves occasionally to do those things feel so big for our partners.

But also, like, I think there's a lot of flexibility and space for learning and space for being able to receive love the way our partner feels most loving, giving it.





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Maggie

Yes, yeah. 100%. We're on the same page about that.

Emily Nagoski

Also, that book is super heteronormative and a little bit misogynist.

Maggie

Yes. So thank you, Emily. See, okay, I did this episode, Rethinking the Five Love Languages, I don't know, last year. And I had this moment, I'm just gonna share with everybody where I was really afraid.

I was like, this is the most sold relationship book on earth. And I'm gonna publicly say, "Here are all the things that I think we need to rethink about this book." And I felt fear, like, in my body, I felt the sensation of fear. I had a stress cycle or two about it. And then I thought, but this is what I genuinely believe and I know someone on earth needs to hear this.

So I recorded that episode. And I was really shocked. Because here's what happened. People would come to me, message me, send me notes and things and say, "Oh, my God, I understand now why I read it and I just I couldn't, it didn't make sense to me." Or, "I couldn't -- all this just put it together for me in a different way." So I think it's so important.

And for everything I teach here, I'm like, take through your inner wisdom. Take it through your highest inner wisdom, through your discernment and take what you think is amazing and leave what you think isn't. And I want to perpetuate, just like Emily was saying earlier, you are the





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expert on your body.

You're the expert on your marriage. We are sharing things we have found to be useful. And that research has told us is useful for a lot of people. But you take it and make it your own.

Emily Nagoski

That doesn't mean it works for you.

Maggie

Exactly. Yeah. I love that.

Emily Nagoski

Yeah, I would just so hope that people could feel the same way about Come as You Are and Burnout. Like, take what's useful for you. And if it's not useful, it's not for you. Like just because it's true for other people doesn't mean it's supposed to be true for you. And just because, like something is like, "No, this is not effective. This is not how it works, according to the science," doesn't mean it's not effective, or how it works for you.

Maggie

Yes.

Emily Nagoski

And, like you. I know human givers syndrome teaches us that other people are the experts in us. And we need to take their advice and accommodate them. But that's truly not how it works.





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Maggie

100%, which is perfect to talk now about gratitude. Because we all learned it this other way, right? Or the different ways we've learned it. And it's like we use what's useful to us, and we leave what isn't useful for us. And there's perhaps a more useful way to think about gratitude. Tell us about that.

Emily Nagoski

So I learned about gratitude, as many people did from like, mid 2000s Oprah.

Maggie

Yes. So did I.

Emily Nagoski

It's like all TV shows, and was very much a list of like, make 10 things you're grateful for every day, to stay focused on gratitude. I had a jar that said gratitude, and I would write things down and put them in the jar.

And to be frank, it made me hate myself. Because I was like, every day writing down that I was grateful to have a roof over my head. And I was grateful for the opportunity for education. I was grateful to like have like access to the public libraries that I need and blah, blah.

And on one level, I was like, what kind of bad person am I that I need to remind myself every day to be grateful to have a roof over my head and food to eat, and access to education where my teachers did not dismiss me, because I'm a woman or whatever?





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And on the other hand, I got really angry and resentful, because I was like, why do I need to invest time and money in being grateful for having my basic human rights met? Like housing and food and education are human rights. Why am I a bad person for not remembering to be thankful in my heart for human rights? For human rights! Sorry about the yelling. I have feelings about it.

So both of those things were going on, and I stopped. And so like we had to include gratitude in Burnout, because of course you do. Because it's a book for women's well being and so I was like, fine, I'm gonna look in the research and I'm gonna prove that everything we thought about gratitude is wrong, and that, that's not actually effective.

And it's just an oppressive tool, the patriarchy telling us to be happy for how good we have it now, compared to the past. And turns out gratitude is really, really, really good for you. But the evidence based strategies for gratitude are not write a list of 10 things you're grateful for.

And let me just say if writing a list of 10 things you're grateful for even five things makes you feel good. And do that. Go for it. For some people that works really well, and every time I do this in a workshop people are like, "But I, I really love that practice it makes me feel great." Great, do that.

But if it does not work for you, if makes you feel angry, like it made me feel angry, try the actual evidence based strategies which come in two different flavors. One, there's gratitude for who you have. The classic example of this is the gratitude letter to someone where you write down like a thank you to someone who did something for you about a specific time.





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And this will boost your well being for weeks just having written down how grateful you are. If you want to, like amplify it, you can send the letter to the person or even read it to them face to face. "Thank you so much for being present for me at whatever difficult time in my life. Here's the way that you helped me." And you're boasting both people's well being for like three months.

Maggie

That's awesome. I just thought about the intro for this episode, it's like three months we got now.

Emily Nagoski

It's so good for you. It's so good for you to do that. The other is grateful for how you have it. So this is where you sort of write a little narrative of like a good event that happened today, you give it a title, you sort of briefly describe what happened. And then you talk about how it came to be possible to have that thing.

So instead of just, "I'm grateful to have a roof over my head," you think more deeply about: why is it I have a roof over my head? And why I have this particular roof over my head is that when my husband and I were thinking about getting married, my husband's father died, which was agony, obviously, and he left us, he left my husband enough money to put a down payment on a house.

That is the only way we would have been able to afford to buy a house. Which we had a dog and three cats. How are we ever going to find a place we could afford to rent? And so my gratitude for a roof is not just gratitude to having a basic human right met, it's gratitude for my father in law, whom I barely got to know, who planned so well and loved his children so much that we could afford to buy a house in a moment when it was really important for us.





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So I've transformed the, "I'm grateful to have a roof over my head," into a connection with my familial ancestor, which is so different. And then, like there's bigger, deeper stuff about the white privilege that allows inherited money to give me enough to be able to buy a house, which is not how it works for a lot of families of color in the United States.

So it's much deeper than just, "I'm glad to have a roof over my head." It's, "I'm profoundly grateful to the families that came before me that made it possible for this." And it also gives me a sense of responsibility to create a world where that's possible and accessible to everyone, not just people like me.

And wouldn't it be great if people could afford to buy a house before a family member dies? So it's for me, it's connected to like a sense of like, social justice and making the world a better place as well as gratitude. And like insight into the privilege that I carry around. Why do I have this roof over my head?

Maggie

So powerful, so powerful.

Emily Nagoski

So you just -- in the research, they're like, "Do three of these a day." Three of these a day was too much for me. I did one a day and it changed my life.

Maggie

So beautiful. So a deeper understanding of sex, a deeper understanding of stress, and a deeper





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understanding of gratitude. We understand, Emily, you cannot answer your own emails. Because when you have time to think you change the world. So what we need to do is give you time to think.

Emily Nagoski

I'm actually -- I'm writing another book now. So when I do stuff like this, it's like a break from that, which is great.

Maggie

Love it. We already -- I already know it's life changing. So we're ready for it.

Emily Nagoski

Just to be like -- because this is in the context of marriage. That book is about what I did in the process of writing the book and then sort of traveling around with *Come as You Are*. I was so exhausted and overwhelmed from thinking and talking about sex all the time that I had no interest in having any actual sex in my marriage, and so it's about what I did and what helped me to be able to take my own advice, and heal and restore my sexual connection with myself and with my husband.

Maggie

Okay, so when that comes out, you will be back. We must know all the things about that.

Emily Nagoski

It doesn't even have a title yet.

Maggie





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It's gonna be awesome. And before we wrap up, okay, we're just gonna take one minute and we're gonna say: tell us the names of your romance novels. And tell us if you're gonna write more fiction because we need to know.

Emily Nagoski

So the titles are, How Not to Fall and How Not to Let Go. My romance author name is Emily Foster. I do continue to write romance but it's mostly for my own mental health, my creative self expression. Like journaling is to make romance stories, but I have not been writing for publication lately.

I might after I finish this next nonfiction book, write another. I have an idea. My hero in those books -- it's a duology. So like the first book like ends in the middle of their story, and their happily ever after is at the end of the second book. And the hero has a sister and I would really like to write her story.

Maggie

Okay, we're just going to put that out into the universe that, that's happening. Yeah. So that'll be beautiful. Thank you for saying yes. Thank you for being here. Thank you for everything you shared today and for your life changing work.

Emily Nagoski

It's 100% My pleasure.

Maggie

Bye everyone.

