

"Emily and Amelia Nagoski deconstruct the stress we experience as women, and their compassionate, science-based advice on how to release it made me cry with gratitude and relief. The book is that revolutionary."
—PEGGY ORENSTEIN

burnout

the secret to
unlocking
the stress cycle

Emily Nagoski, PhD

New York Times bestselling author of *Come as You Are*

Amelia Nagoski, DMA

**Discussion Guide
For Book Clubs**

Introduction

A User's Guide to Burnout

“Your body, with its instinct for self-preservation, knows, on some level, that Human Giver Syndrome is slowly killing you. That’s why you keep trying mindfulness and green smoothies and self-care trend after self-care trend. But that instinct for self-preservation is battling a syndrome that insists that self-preservation is selfish, so your efforts to care for yourself might actually make things worse, activating even more punishment from the world or from yourself, because how dare you?”

- When did you last feel emotionally exhausted? What did it feel like?
- What helps you get “unstuck,” so that you can go all the way though the emotion “tunnel”?
- Are you a human giver? What cost does that have in your life? What benefits does it have? Who are the givers in your life?
- What is your “cheese”? That is, where would like to end up, after reading this book?

Part 1: Only What You Take With You

Complete the Cycle

“To be “well” is not to live in a state of perpetual safety and calm, but to move fluidly from a state of adversity, risk, adventure, or excitement, back to safety and calm, and out again. Stress is not bad for you; being stuck is bad for you.”

- What strategies help you “complete the cycle”? Are there some that work sometimes and others that work other times?
- What does it feel like to complete the cycle?
- Of the reasons we get stuck, which felt most like your life: chronic stressors → chronic stress; social appropriateness; safety; freeze?
- Have you experienced “the Feels” or watched someone else experience them? What was it like?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 1: Only What You Take With You

CHAPTER 2

#Persist

“But a lot of the time, knowing when to give up comes to us not from rational, explicit cost-benefit analysis; it comes to us the same way it comes to the bird and the squirrel—in a quiet intuition that is outside rationality. We simply hear the voice inside us saying, ‘You’ve done all you can here. It’s time to move on.’”

“Humans—especially women—have an extraordinary capacity to ignore this voice.”

~

“The quality of our lives is not measured by the amount of time we spend in a state of perfection. [...]. The quality of our lives, day to day, is measured by our freedom to choose to stay or leave. That freedom comes when we have abundance enough and safety enough to let go of what is broken and reach for something new.”

- When was a time you felt “foopy,” oscillating between frustrated rage and helpless despair? What did you do that helped?
- Often what women need is not more “grit” or motivation or “persistence,” but more help. Can you think of a time when, rather than persisting at something, you reached out for help? What made that situation different?
- If a team is collaborating on a shared, ambitious goal, how might they adapt “redefining winning” and “redefining failing” to that goal? What would happen for the team if they tried it?
- When you filled out the **Redefine Winning Worksheet**, how did you work out a goal that was soon, certain, positive, concrete, specific, and personal?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 1: Only What You Take With You

CHAPTER 3 Meaning

“But no matter what forces oppose you, whether it’s Human Giver Syndrome or natural disasters or personal loss, nothing can stand between you and your Something Larger.”

“Your Something Larger lives inside you.”

- What is your “Something Larger”?
- In what ways do you engage with that Something Larger, to make meaning?
- What does it feel like to lose contact with your Something Larger and thus lose a sense of meaning in life?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 2: The Real Enemy

CHAPTER 4

The Game Is Rigged

“Seeing the rigged game isn’t a neutral experience; you’ll probably feel some feelings about it as you go through the world spotting the ways the game is rigged and the ways the world is lying to you about the ways the game is rigged.”

- What adversities have shaped the way you grew? What are the “headwinds” you’ve faced?
- What adversities have shaped the way you grew? What are the “headwinds” you’ve faced?
- Now the harder question: What *tailwinds* have you had at your back, facilitating your growth toward the sun?
- When you filled out the **Smashin’ Some Patriarchy** Worksheet, what did it feel like to consider the ways you’re making the world better just by doing what matters to you?
- What was an important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 2: The Real Enemy

CHAPTER 5

The Bikini Industrial Complex

“Many of us have grown into world-class ignorers of our own needs, just as we were taught to be. We don’t even notice that we’re ignoring our needs. Our bodies are sending us all kinds of signals, but we live from the neck up, only attending to the noise in our heads and shutting out the noise coming from the other 95 percent of our internal experience.”

- What did it feel like, to read about the science that says weight doesn’t have the relationship to health that the Bikini Industrial Complex insists it has? Do you believe it? What would you lose, if it’s true?
- Learning to love your body doesn’t mean the rest of the world will do the same. How might you practice living with the tension between loving your body and living in a world that still punishes women for the shape of their bodies?
- What was it like to see beauty in bodies – including your own – that might not conform with the “aspirational ideal”? Was it easier to see beauty in yourself or in others?
- What might it be like to begin a daily practice – maybe first thing when you wake up or last thing before you go to bed – to ask your body, “Hi, honey. What do you need?”
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 3: Wax On, Wax Off

CHAPTER 6

Connect

“We need both connection and autonomy. That’s not a contradiction. Humans are built to oscillate from connection to autonomy and back again.”

- Who are the most important people in your Bubble of Love?
- Trust can be broken and repaired. In a relationship where trust was broken and successfully repaired, how did you and the other person heal together?
- Which style of “knowing” characterizes you best, connected knowing or separate knowing? If you have a partner, which style characterizes them?
- With whom, or in what contexts, can you be fully authentic? What benefits are there to being able to put on a social “mask”? What are the costs?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 3: Wax On, Wax Off

CHAPTER 7

What Makes You Stronger

“Sometimes we mistake our guilt about resting for our passionate commitment to the people and ideas we cherish most. But in reality, the status quo thrives in a context where people who want to change the world believe that sleep is a sign of weakness and that rest is the enemy.”

- Are comfortable are you with daydreaming and being entertained by your own thoughts? Do you find yourself getting impatient or needing distraction? What low-demand activities may facilitate your ability to daydream?
- When you fill out the **24/7 Worksheet**, what did you notice? Were there places you could insert more rest?
- How much sleep do you need? How much do you get? What obstacles – external and internal – stand between you and more sleep?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Part 3: Wax On, Wax Off

CHAPTER 8 Grow Mighty

“Again and again, women describe their madwoman as an uncomfortable, even unpleasant person ... and they describe her fragility, vulnerability, or sadness. This uncomfortable, fragile part of ourselves serves a very important function.”

- What is your “madwoman” like, and how would you describe your relationship with her?
- When you did the **Madwoman Worksheet**, could you find the vulnerability behind the critical, mean voice? What was it like to try to befriend, rather than silence, your inner critic?
- Have you ever felt your madwoman take over in a situation where you felt something was being expected of you that was unfair? Or when you fell short of your own expectations for yourself? If you go back to that moment and ask your madwoman what she was feeling in that moment, what would she tell you?
- Imagine that your practice of self-compassion – that is, compassion for the madwoman – helped you heal and grow mighty. What would you do with that strength? How do you feel about that possibility?
- What was one important idea in this chapter, for you?

Conclusion

Joyfully Ever After

“To need help feeling “enough” is not a pathology; it is not “neediness.” It’s as normal as your need to assure the people you love that they can trust themselves, that they can be as tender and compassionate with themselves as you would be with them. And this exchange, this connection, is the springboard from which we launch into a joyful life.”

- What does it feel like, when you connect with other “givers” and give them the gift of, “You are enough”? What does it feel like to receive that gift?
- What was one *really* important idea in this book, an idea you’ll take away and use in your life?