

"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

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**A Guide to Using Burnout
For Teachers**

Introduction

Dear teachers,

First of all, I'm thrilled you're reading this. I taught high school for five years, and was a textbook case of teacher burnout. After a break of several years, after I learned a lot of the stuff in this book, I went back to teaching again and found it much, much more sustainable. So I hope it helps you, too! Healthy, joyful teachers are the best solution to smash the patriarchy and actually create a generation who are unwilling to perpetuate systems of oppression.

Second, a suggestion: as a teacher, I immediately imagine how I can apply what I learn to my teaching and to use it for my students immediately. Every scrap of what's in this book is also in my teaching, and it makes it much better.

But.

I'd like to challenge you to imagine it in your own life, too, not just in your work. Yes, your students will benefit from completing the cycle and learning the game is rigged and the bikini industrial complex; but they'll benefit even more from having a teacher in front of them who is as rested as possible, and as ready to turn toward her own suffering with kindness and compassion as she is to turn toward theirs.

—Amelia

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?”

- How do you feel at the beginning of the school year? Have you ever experienced the dread that Julie describes?
- 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 “tunnel”?
- I know, I know, you want to teach your students to be Givers. That’s awesome! One of you should write a book about how to do that! Later. For the moment, focus on how Human Giver Syndrome affects your work and your life. To what extent does it help or hurt? 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

CHAPTER 1

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”?
- How much does teaching let you feel your feelings, and how much does it require you to repress? Is it different when you’re dealing with students vs. parents vs. administrators? How is interacting with adults different from leading a class of students?
- 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.”

- What are some aspects of the teaching profession that can lead you to feel “foopy,” oscillating between frustrated rage and helpless despair? Students? Administrators? Parents? Colleagues?
- Often what teachers 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? What resources are available to you? How can you find more?
- Amelia immediately wanted to share the Redefine Winning Worksheet with her students, but teachers will benefit from it, too! How do 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.”

- Lots of teachers choose teaching because it’s their Something Larger – making a contribution to society, leaving a legacy, caring for children. How true is that for you? Has it changed over the course of your career? How does it change how you feel about your work and your working conditions?
- Besides teaching, what makes you feel connected to Something Larger?
- How is being a teacher in the 21st century different from the past? Without getting distracted by the details of new standards/curricula (... No Child Left Behind or whatever new thing government officials with zero education training arbitrarily decide matters in schools) focus on how those changes impact your connection to teaching as Something Larger.
- Let’s talk about school shootings. Did you start teaching before or after Columbine (1999)? Is there another memorable event that shaped the kind of safety teachers and students expect in their school? Does the increase in school shootings and the introduction of active shooter drills impact your sense of purpose?
- 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.”

- The material in this chapter is some of the most tempting to offer your students. Go ahead and do that... LATER. First, focus on your own experiences.
- 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?
- What shape tree are you? Did you grow up on a cliff or in a forest or in an open field? What shape trees are your students? Do you teach on a cliff, where almost every student withstands adversity, or are you in an open field where students grow relatively unencumbered? What’s the relationship between where you grew and where your students are growing? How does that impact your work and your living?
- 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 would happen if you felt free to Smash in the classroom?
- 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?
- Your students are neck deep in the B.I.C. Does anything you teach them help them escape it? Do you teach media literacy? Critical thinking? Nonjudgement? Do you talk about infrastructure? Systemic oppression? Do you teach them to be kind to their neighbors no matter what they look like?
- 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.”

- Faculty meetings are notoriously useless, frustrating, and dull. How can the community of teachers in your school connect in a way that is more authentic, constructive, and valuable?
- Who are the most important people in your Bubble of Love?
- Which style of “knowing” characterizes you best, connected knowing or separate knowing? If you have a partner, which style characterizes them?
- What opportunities do you have to teach your students separate knowing? Connected knowing?
- 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?
- How easily distracted are your students? How much opportunity do they have for rest during the day? If you give them a break, is it hard to get their attention back? How much practice does it take to get comfortable oscillating between rest and effort?
- 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?