

## Ep #180: Neuroplasticity and The Inner Critic



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Leah Badertscher

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## Ep #180: Neuroplasticity and The Inner Critic

There's a quote by Cezanne that I keep handy in my art studio, "Don't be an art critic. Paint. Therein lies salvation." What do you do, however, if you have already been seized by that voice that so many artists know well? And that is the voice of the inner critic.

In such a situation, you might long to paint with all of your heart, or to sing, or to write, to express yourself in whatever medium most calls to you. But it's like your body, your mind has been hijacked. It can feel like paralysis. It can feel like a deep fog. It can feel like desperation, anxiety, depression, grief, rage. But it doesn't seem like something you can get out of. It feels like being trapped within yourself.

I struggled with this for years. And it was such a terrible feeling, this longing for art and creativity to be made through me, and not being able to make any headway or any progress. And instead, just feeling even more miserable because I could tell I was in my own way.

And then, along came the word that changed my life, neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity, for me, was the portal, the gateway to learning and studying everything I could about the neuroscience of creativity.

Why that is important for me and for you is this. What I discovered is that it wasn't something that was wrong with me. It wasn't that I was somehow flawed or broken because I just couldn't get out of my own way. And that's what I want you to hear, is that if you are existing at any level that does not feel to you like it's fulfilling your full potential, that it's somewhere below your zone of genius that there's not something wrong with you.

It's not a personality issue or a moral or a character or spiritual flaw. It's something happening in your brain. And the reason I found neuroplasticity to be such a hope and a life-giving miracle is because the definition is this.

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It's the ability of the brain to form and reorganize synaptic connections, especially in response to learning or experience or following an injury.

The neural connections that most of us have been educated and conditioned to think are most helpful for our learning, our growth, and our creativity are rooted in criticism. Not in an objective evaluation that is constructive, or maybe it's not received or perceived by our brain that way.

And neuroscience has shown that criticism, whether it comes from ourselves or others, is experienced by the brain as a threat. Now, this might seem obvious, but being in a constant state of threat, in that kind of hypervigilance moves our body into survival mode. This is neither good for our health, for our brain health, our overall health. And it's not good for our creativity, our art, our bottom line, our relationships, and our life.

But knowledge is power, and so that's why I'm so excited to share some of these fundamentals of the neurophysiology of the inner critic and creativity, and in upcoming episodes, some suggestions for how you can begin to shift that relationship and, more and more, reside in a state where you are truly in creative mode and that survival and threat around your art is a thing of the past.

You are listening to *The Art School Podcast*, a show for artists and creatives who want to become the next greatest version of themselves. Learn how to cultivate an extraordinary way of being and take the mystery out of making money, and the struggle out of making art. Here is your host, master certified life coach, artist, and former lawyer, Leah Badertscher.

Hello, everyone, and welcome to another episode of *The Art School Podcast*. So, I'm recording this for you – it's Easter weekend for us. We are celebrating Easter. So, happy Easter to all of you who have celebrated and happy Passover to my friends that are celebrating that as well.

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The last few days have been so wonderful. We got to celebrate a magical, amazing friend's birthday and it was an evening of incredible food and laughter and playing music. Guitars were played. There was singing, piano playing, which is not irrelevant to today's episode. I sat down and played the piano. Husbands were playing the guitar.

I have not, in my adult life, ever played with other people. And I had recently told my piano instructor – Kristen, if you're listening – that yeah, I'm just not interested at this point in playing around other people. I just want to do this for myself.

But you know what? After a cocktail before dinner or two and wine with dinner – ouch the next day – and I seem to have misplaced my inhibition about playing with people. So, it was so fun just to sit down and not care if I screwed up and to play things by ear and just improvise.

So, it actually was incredibly eye-opening to me that I had something within me that I just did not even know was there. And it's given me a lot to think about, especially as it pertains to this episode. Because for me, the journey to move beyond perfectionism, to be a more fully-expressed creative and woman and human being has really been about addressing all aspects, mind, body, and spirit.

And there have been many times in my life where I just felt like my body has a mind of its own and I could feel the potential for art within me. But it was almost like trapped deep inside in different worlds almost, or I'd wondered if I was imaging it, so strong was the physical experience I had of just being blocked and locked up inside of myself.

And again, that, years ago, is what's moved me on this journey. I didn't want to only make art. I also wanted this to be about a spiritual evolution. I

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knew it had to be both. For me, creativity is both spiritual and pragmatic. If it's not one, it's not the other.

And something I have found to be so profoundly healing and empowering, first for myself and always continuing, ongoing for myself, and also for my clients, is knowledge and is science, and particularly neuroscience.

I mentioned, when I first saw that word neuroplasticity, I almost ripped it out of the page of the book. It felt like a spiritual healing in that moment. I realized how deeply I had been punishing myself, criticizing myself, how harsh I had been with myself that this was just something wrong with me, that I couldn't create more freely, I couldn't bring these dreams to life, I couldn't bring these visions to life.

And when I searched out help, the well-meaning advice – and not incorrect – that I got was, “Well you're just in your own way.” But it was really hard to find people who could understand what it was that would help me move out of my own way.

And neuroplasticity, reading that word, it was more than a golden breadcrumb. I could see the whole golden path of possibility, that this wasn't just who I was, feeling like my true self was trapped inside what I now know was just layers and layers of deep-conditioned armor.

It was like my soul was locked inside of a fortress. And I think that fortress, I'd created for protective measures, but so long ago had thrown away the key and forgot that I created it. I thought that was just who I was, this very well-armored, guarded person who could still manage to be high-functioning and could get things done.

But I wasn't getting done something that mattered so deeply to me, and it really felt like it was at the core of who I was. And not surprisingly, this

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leads, one, to at best being very frustrated and, at worst, being very depressed and despairing.

So, again, I love this field of neuroscience. I devour anything I can find about neuroscience and creativity, and neuroscience and mindfulness, and neuroscience and spirituality, neuroscience and intuition. And then also, the neuroscience of what happens when we are in the counter states to these states, what's happening to us?

What's happening in our brains and in our bodies when we are disconnected from our truth and feel locked within ourselves? What creates that mechanism that puts us on mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, creative lockdown?

And as I've mentioned in prior episodes, I am fascinated, in love with this process of regeniusing, restoring us to that connection with our innate gifts. And then, from that place, from a place of ease and joy and love and bliss, falling in love with ourselves, our work, the world again, what can we do?

And so, I want to be clear, at this point, that I'm not about throwing out tools of constructive evaluation and reflection. And I want to make an important distinction between self-criticism on one hand and self-reflection and self-evaluation on the other hand.

Because when done in a healthy, constructive manner, self-reflection and self-evaluation, when done objectively, again, can support our efforts to connect with our deepest truth, to achieve our goals and our dreams. It can help us grow our wisdom. It can support our evolution, the growth that matters to us. And again, at the end of the day, helps us move closer to our vision.

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Self-criticism, on the other hand, is more of a knee-jerk kind of assessment. And it's one that is not constructive. It's actually deconstructive, destructive. It's demeaning. It devalues us and our work. And in that devaluation, it doesn't add value to our lives. It also has a host of – it's like that word, a host of maladies and downstream negative effects, which we will get to in a little bit. But none of which enhance your wellbeing, spiritual, mental, emotion, and instead can cause you to retreat, not in a useful way, to pull away from others, from your work, from your own deep truth, and isolate.

Self-criticism can actually turn into a kind of negative self-obsession where we're turning inward in the most non-helpful of ways. And again, from an understandable place where we want to avoid shame and future criticism. Caroline Myss says that, "Perfectionism is the fear of being criticized." So, self-criticism drives that perfectionism. Perfectionism can drive, again, turning inward, isolating, actually retreating from your goals, retreating from being engaged with your work in the world in a way so that your soul moves forward, your contributions move forward, your work, your craft moves forward.

We don't ask for help when we are engaging in self-criticism because we're afraid of what we're going to hear and that we won't be able to take it because already, that part of our brain that I'll talk about in a moment, is already hyperactive, that part that perceives self-criticism as threat.

And so, anything that it perceives as being a near-relation to self-criticism, even if someone is well-intentioned, but especially if they don't have great bedside manner, we're going to fear that and shut down.

So, self-criticism is not actually a tool to enhance your ability of becoming an affluent artist. And by affluent artist, I mean being able to flow your genius and also flow an abundance of resources, both receiving, like receiving monetary compensation for your work, and also being in that flow



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of being able to access all the inner or external resources that creatives or artists are so great at accessing when we are in creative mode, when we are in not survival mode, but we are instead deeply connected.

We resource ideas from God knows where, literally. We access things that we don't know how we know. We access meaning throughout our lives, that part of our brain that works millions and millions of times faster than our analytical, logical thinking mind. We don't have access to that. We don't have access to our imaginal mind when we are in this restricted survival mode.

So, again, I wanted to make this distinction between self-reflection and self-evaluation, and any tools that enhance those. So, by tools that enhance those. If you are a painter and you want to learn more – let's say you pain in acrylics and you want to learn more about oils, yes, go out and learn more about oils. Have a mentor. Ave colleagues. Have allies.

If you are currently a novelist but you want to branch out and write plays, immerse yourself in the playwrighting world. Again, I have had this conversation enough to know that people are very afraid to part ways with their inner critic. And here's an important point about that.

Sometimes, it can be from a strange loyalty that smacks of a familial loyalty. Because sometimes, our inner critic was formed, largely in part by places we grew up, by teachers, parents, early childhood friends or mentors. And so, even if we arrive at a point in our lives where we can see that those ways in which that voice of the inner critic that kept us in line, that kept us on the straight and narrow, that helped us make something out of ourselves and it did indeed move us through places in life for which we are grateful, we can have a strange reluctance then, and understandable once you know this, once you're conscious of the origins of the formation of the inner critic, we can be reluctant to let it go.



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And even if it is an incredibly abusive voice and incredibly destructive. Some people are afraid to let the inner critic go because they assume that the suggestion is that you are not replacing it with anything that will then enhance your life, that you're just simply throwing out any evaluation out the door.

And that's not the case. When you replace self-criticism with constructive, healthy relationships to yourself, to your work, and to the world, you then are strengthening and enhancing, actively strengthening, enhancing, creating new neural pathways; neuronal connections in your brain that will help you engage in the kind of supportive, creative relationship with yourself and with your work that feels like you have a deep, strong foundation underneath it.

It feels like a positive mentoring relationship, but one that rises up from within yourself. It feels like you being held in your own safe and steady container.

This doesn't mean that nothing ever challenges you. But it does have the sense – we talk about it in the Art School Mastermind – of you're standing on your own solid, sacred ground, on bedrock. You don't feel like you're falling through the slats in the board of the universe. You feel held and deeply supported.

And that's by you and that's by the work that you've done to cultivate a healthy relationship. And again, I want to say here, for many people, this is cultivating a healthy relationship with themselves, their art, the creative process. And for many people, myself included, this includes cultivating a relationship with soul, with the higher power, your creative source, the universe, however you want to think about it. That's, for many people, a profound part of this process as well.

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And part of learning to replace self-criticism – in that camp I am including judgment, like a judgment that’s not discerning, but a judgment that says, “You’re so stupid. You’ll never figure this out. You don’t have what it takes. God, why can’t you get it together? Man, you’re such a mess,” that kind of judgment; not discernment.

So, replacing those voices of the inner critic, self-criticism, judgment, with positive, healthy, constructive self-evaluation – and I do talk about that in a lot of episodes, always, this is what we’re doing in the Art School Mastermind and, of course, I’ll talk about it more in upcoming episodes. But when we work with what’s working within ourselves and work with the best knowledge that is available for us, including cutting-edge knowledge about neuroscience and creativity, we can rewire our brain.

We can recondition our body to align with that force within us in such a way that serves it and serves our art and serves the world and serves our bottom line and serves our vision and serves our highest self and the highest good of all.

That, to me, is the ultimate exciting conversation that we should be having all the time. How can we individually, in small groups, and collectively rewire our brains and recondition our bodies to align with our highest potential, to express that and, in that process, it’s such an incredible healing process.

And I alluded to a couple of things just within that phrase when I said, “How can we individually and also in small groups and communities...”

Because I do think this is – and there’s a lot of science that bears this out – doing this in community, whether it’s with a therapist, with a coach, with a small group, with the French style salons, with other people who are aware of the difference between destructive self-criticism and soul work, art-

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supporting, artist-supporting evaluation, you start to entrain yourself to that healthy regulation of other well-regulated nervous systems that are also being great conduits and channels for their creativity and for the highest good.

You learn so much just physiologically being in that space, not only by what people are saying, but by who they are and how they are embodying that way, that healthy, loving, kind, powerful force of nature, badass way of creating in the world. You can help model that to one another and also entrain yourself around this higher vision collectively. Because then, in these groups, what happens is that it amplifies.

And when we collaborate, it frees up – and I'm not saying that you're necessarily writing each other's books or painting each other's paintings, but creatively collaborating on becoming, on cultivating these extraordinary ways of being in mind, body, and spirit.

That kind of community, the right kind of community for you – and I will too, like the end of my days, proclaim, don't give up until you find the right kind of community for you. Don't disregard or count yourself out of it because you haven't found them or haven't found the mentor yet. You know what you have in mind and heart. And try them out. Find them for you. It might not be mine. And for many of you, it won't be mine.

But it's so important that you know and hear that there is one for you and that you can create it, and just that experience is so incredible that I wish that for all of you, and that this process of rewiring your brain, reconditioning your body to be that affluent artist, the experience of doing that in community is effective and is profound.

So, now I want to talk a little bit more specifically about what neuroscience has shown, that criticism, the inner critic, self-judgment or judgment

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received from others, what effect that has on our brains, our bodies, and therefore our creativity.

As I mentioned in the intro, neuroscience has found that criticism, whether it's by ourselves or others, is experienced by our brain as a threat. Another way of saying this is the same areas of our brain that are responsible for responding to external threats, these same areas are activated by self-criticism.

So, self-criticism is experienced the same as, let's say, someone coming at you from the outside with a real physical violent threat. In an article published in Mindful Magazine in 2019, authors Neff and Germer wrote that self-criticism, when we're in the midst of it, we are, "Both the attacker and the attacked."

So, if my story about how I felt I was always in my own way or if you have ever identified with being your own worst enemy, being both the attacker and the attacked will probably resonate with you too.

So, if our brains are experiencing criticism or self-criticism as threat, what happens next makes so much sense. Because if the brain is experiencing a threat, its number-one job is to keep you alive and is to keep you safe. So, all of its energy must go to keeping you alive and safe.

One of the ways it does that is to create hypervigilance. One of the ways that might manifest is that you have maybe a heightened sensitivity to feeling threatened, a heightened sensitivity to criticism, whether it be external or your own.

And then it makes sense that you would avoid any potential encounters with such criticism. And what's a perfect way to avoid them but to not play to your creative edge? To instead retreat, to instead play it safe. Because if

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criticism is experienced the same as an external threat, we want to avoid that danger, that jeopardy, which intellectually we might understand is jeopardy only to a small part of our ego that's not serving us, that we want to let go.

But our body is responding quite differently and sometimes, oftentimes, our body is responding so strongly so that the feeling is so intense that it tells us that there is actually great harm laying out there, that people will say, "Gosh, but it just feels so real. It feels so intense," and that's how it's felt to me too.

This is also because the amygdala, the fear center, is calling forth any threats you've ever experienced in your past and making the same assessment on this one, even though they could be completely different, even though perhaps when you were young and you spoke out of turn, you voiced your opinions, perhaps you were really severely punished.

And you know intellectually that's no longer the case, but your brain doesn't know that. And the pathways, the psychophysiology of all this is such that you are reacting as if that perhaps seven-year-old version of you would have reacted.

So, again, when we are criticized or experiencing self-criticism, the brain is experiencing that as a threat. It marshals all its energies and forces to focus on staying safe and on survival.

Therefore, as I've said in previous podcasts, this moves you into a fight, flight, freeze, or fawn stress response state. Fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. From that state, we can still produce things that we might even call creating. I know I have before, but it feels so forced. And I want to talk about the distinction and this relationship more in an upcoming episode, so I won't go too far down that rabbit hole.

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But it's not the same as the capital C Creating. We can still be very productive when under the gun, including our own, in this kind of state. But we have we have actually inhibited our ability to reach into that part of our mind where we access our imagination.

We also have inhibited our ability to deactivate any of the stress response. So, this is why it can feel so desperate and so paralyzing and so maddening when you're in it because you're like, "I know I'm doing this to myself but I can't stop doing this to myself."

And I want to say more about this, so much compassion, curiosity and compassion are your great superhero allies here on your creative journey. And also again, to point you towards this pathway of possibility where you can absolutely 100% change this response and this relationship. You can absolutely revolutionize what it feels like on the inside of you in relationship to yourself, your creative work, your dreams, your aspirations, and sharing them with the world.

So, I wanted to make sure to weave that hope into it there because I know sometimes talking about being within that stress response and not being able to move yourself out of it, that can actually activate it.

What is so good to know is those times when you're in it and you're like, "I just can't think my way out of this," in that moment, you are right. You are right. So, there are so many tools – we'll talk more about this. You can do your own search as well. Empower yourself with knowledge and tools and keep looking until you find ones that work for you. But there are so many out there.

But it's just good to know in the moment that you can stop beating yourself up in that moment. You can stop thinking that there's something wrong with

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you. Like I love to tell my clients, it is not you. It's not your personality. It's just the neural biology of it.

And once you know the mechanism and the nature of it, then you know how to work with it. And if you are someone who loves to go down rabbit holes, one thing you might like to research is the ventromedial prefrontal cortex. So, this is the part of our brains that regulates emotional responses when triggered by the amygdala. And especially regulates our emotional responses that, when those triggers are associated with fear and with threat.

So, when we're activated, when the amygdala is triggered by fear or threat, the volume of this center, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, it gets turned way down. So, our capacity is actually biologically diminished to regulate our emotions. And all of this is not to say that you can't learn regulation strategies. It's just good to have compassion for yourself when you know, "Oh my gosh, criticism, to my brain, equals threat and fear. Threat and fear in my brain means that shuts down the part of my brain that helps me to regulate threat and fear, that helps me to feel like a normal, healthy, grounded, stable person."

And again, this is not to condone lashing out, but I actually think knowing these things and talking to yourself, practicing third-person distancing and breathing, all these strategies can help you move back into a state of regulation.

The other way I hope this also empowers and inspires you is that, if you have been thinking, "Gosh, what's wrong with me? I can't take criticism," or maybe you're so hard on yourself you have such high expectations, but things aren't moving along, I hope this both empowers you to learn how you can cultivate a different neural pathway for healthy self-evaluation, and also inspires you that the more you do that, the more creative you will be,



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the more you can learn how to foster curiosity and compassion, not the less creative or lax you'll be, but the more access you will have to that innate creative genius that has been laid over, that has been buried for years by conditioning from the voice of judgment.

Also, if you've been someone who has used, employed self-criticism as a means of wanting to get ahead or wanting to fully express your creativity, wanting to meet and achieve your goals and dreams, it is so empowering to know that it's actually counter-productive, that actually self-criticism, which is perceived by a threat, it literally shuts down the areas of your brain and does not allow you access to the things that would help you innovate, to those parts of the brain that help us access innovation, imagination, help us access long-term memory. And instead, it just puts us into this myopic, pressure-filled zone that is that fight, flight, freeze, fawn mode.

Also, the mechanism of criticism and judgment, those being so closely related, is really fascinating because it's trying to keep us safe. And we know from earlier podcasts, earlier conversations, that change by our brains is perceived as a threat, always.

So, if we're using self-criticism to try to get ourselves past our brains fear of change, can you see why that's instead building up a double wall? Instead, learning how to work with judgment constructively can be so insightful in seeing, where do we maybe have a deep fear of change? Where are we saying that we want some kind of goal or dream in life that would represent massive change? And where are we not giving adequate safe space and voice to the part of us that fears that? And where are we not acknowledging the part of us, even if it's the primal brain running unconsciously, that just prefers stasis?

Because if we don't acknowledge all of those things, again, it's like Jung said, the parts that we don't acknowledge just go underneath and they

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drive our life in such ways unknown to us that are mysterious to us and that we call fate. It's like having a foot on the gas and the brake at the same time. You want something, but a deep part of you also just prefers stasis.

And we can't have a conversation about self-criticism, judgment, our nervous system and creativity without talking about cortisol and the role cortisol plays. Because I just mentioned, sometimes we have a really hard time – a lot of people are resistant to giving up the inner critic. And one reason can also be that we have not only attachment, like a loyalty to this, maybe because of familial formations or origins of it, but also because of our loyalty, our addiction to the cortisol, the hit of cortisol that self-criticism gives us, the jolt that it gives us, the fix that it gives us and moves us forward and motivates us in these fits and bursts.

In his book *The Compassionate Mind: A New Approach to Life's Challenges*, Paul Gilbert talks about what's behind our natural and evolutionary stress response to self-criticism.

So, he found that self-criticism has a distinct physiological pathway that triggers the body's natural stress response. It's what I was referring to earlier as fight or flight, which has since been expanded into freeze and fawn. So, this threat response is the oldest part of our mammalian brain and it does aid us in, again, keeping us from being eaten by lions. It prepares our bodies. It harnesses all of the adrenal response that we need in order to flee or to fight.

So, when the threat system in our brain gets activated, the brain releases the steroid hormone cortisol. It's also known as the stress hormone. So, the threat system gets activated in the brain. The brain releases cortisol. Cortisol then activates the body's sympathetic nervous system.

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So, the sympathetic nervous system is our fast and involuntary response to dangerous and stressful situations and it allows us to adjust our physiology, our bodies so that we're prepared to face the anticipated danger.

In evolutionary terms, our threat system is incredibly efficient and, in certain situations and historically, has allowed us to be incredibly adaptive. Also, our body has these genius inbuilt mechanisms for balance so that ideally, once a threat has gone away, then our parasympathetic, the other part of the nervous system, the parasympathetic nervous system will kick in and then will help basically calm, undo all of that heightened activity that the sympathetic nervous system kicked in during a stressful situation.

So, the threat system is great, if there is an actual – if someone is chasing us, if we were chased by a lion. But when it is our self-criticism, which is our thoughts, that threat system is still being activated. It's still kicking in. And then, as a result, we keep ourselves in this high stress and high alert state because there's not another lion, there's not someone chasing us. But this habit, this pathway of self-criticism is always with us and then keeps this high-stress state in gear.

So, not only is there that, the stress on our body when we're continually in a state of fight or flight and a high-stress response. But research on neuroplasticity also shows that self-criticism rewires our brain's neurocircuitry.

So, it makes our self-judgment, our self-criticism, our negative judgments about ourselves more sticky. They're more habitual. And ultimately, they become automated.

In fact, we don't even have to think really about ourselves anymore, which would be an objective self-evaluation. We just have a feeling that we're bad and that our work is bad.

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Carl Jung said, “Thinking is hard. That’s why most people judge.” You know, he wrote that long before the advent of neuroscience and any sort of fMRI imagery. But that has born out in modern science. Think about that. It becomes so automated to judge ourselves that we no longer have to think about it. It’s so easy. It’s so automated. And how this presents then is people say, “It just feels true.”

So, at this point, I want to remind you of the power of neuroplasticity. And like any power, it works both ways. So, it’s important to know that when you engage in destructive judgment or harsh self-criticism, that you are creating pathways in your brain. You’re creating neural wiring that significantly impacts your happiness, your health, your creativity, and your wealth.

The more you say these negative things to yourself, the more experiences you have of your own harsh criticism or other people’s, then the more densely connected these pathways become, the stronger these pathways become. And the brain likes densely connected pathways. It likes stronger pathways. They’re more efficient. And it tends to prune away anything that’s not that.

So, the more you practice harsh self-criticism, then it’s also simultaneously meaning the harder it is to access the positive, the constructive. And again though, it’s a double-edged sword, neuroplasticity. Because just the same way you can wire a pathway towards despair in a discouraging, at best, relationship with creativity and yourself, you can also rewire your brain, your brain’s neurocircuitry for joy, for ease, for abundance, for bliss, for opportunity, for love, for wonder, for compassion, for discover, for things that you can’t even imagine yet because they’re not on the horizon for someone that’s been so hard on themselves.

Your brain has literally pruned away the ability to see any opportunity like that for you. This is so incredibly – I mean, it’s not miraculous, and it is. It’s

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science and it's also, to me, one of the most exciting possibilities introduced in our lifetime.

So, this brings me to the part of the podcast where I want you to do more than just listen. I want you to lean in and really work with me, coach with me. So, next week, I just want to give you a little heads up, we're going to talk in the coming week or weeks about specific ways to cultivate this healthy and constructive pathway, that pathway that connects you.

I think of it as being like a superhighway for the affluent artist. This week, we talked about the mechanism of self-criticism, the inner critic, judgment in the brain. We talked about cortisol. And next week, I want to offer what's on the other side when you prune the habit, prune the addiction to the cortisol, when you pass up on those thoughts, those habitual thoughts, that habitual way of being, of being hard on yourself, or allowing that to be a part of the cultivation and the amplification and the evolution of your creativity and movement towards your dream, when you're like, "You know what? I think there is a better way." What is on the other side of that is that other neurotransmitters begin to fire in your brain; delicious, delightful ones that aid you in harnessing powerful internal resources, that aid you, again, into coming into flow, being on that affluent artist superhighway.

So, I'm super excited about that conversation. And also talking about how that enhances that practice, cultivating that way of being enhances your entire life. This week though, I want to pause and ask you to reflect in a very compassionate, constructive way about your current relationship to any self-evaluation and self-reflection.

And it's very meta here. It doesn't help our process or souls or anyone, or our art or your dear sweetheart and weary soul, to judge yourself or criticize yourself for having judged and criticized yourself.

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I know what that loop feels like and I'm sending a big hug, and also lots of fierce momma bear tiger energy. Don't do it. Just don't do it. Do not be hard on yourself for having been hard on yourself. Today is a new day. Tomorrow is a new day. You're listening to this podcast already, by listening to this podcast and listening to me talk about these neurophysiological mechanisms, already, and also talk about pathways of possibility, thousands and thousands and thousands of new connections have been formed in your brain just by listening to this episode.

And if you have felt uplifted at all, that's not just chance. That's an actual new connection being made in your brain and then your delightful, miraculous, stunning brain then concocted something delicious, like serotonin, oxytocin, GABA, which are these neurotransmitters that are going to hook you up, put you in the state where you are hooked up with your inner creative genius.

So, remember that. Come back to that over and over again as you then consider your current relationship to self-evaluation and self-reflection. Is it a constructive one? Does it veer more towards criticism? Is it a mix? Maybe you've already been working at this for a while and there's still maybe a remaining 30%, 20% where you're just tightening up boundaries and it's getting better and better all the time.

Engaging in an exercise, again, like this, where you're coming from a place of compassion and you're being constructive about it, asking yourself questions like, "In my process of self-reflection and self-evaluation, as I move myself closer towards my greatest ideal, the way of being in the world, living from my heart, expressing my soul, leaving my fingerprint upon the world, what in that process is currently working I my relationship to myself? In my relationship to my art? In my relationship to my world? What's working? What's not?" Would you like to change anything?

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If no, why? Affirm the deliciousness of your process already. That also is amazing for the brain. If you would like to change it, how? Are you afraid at all of changing it? Is any part of you afraid of changing it?

It's okay if a part of you is afraid. It's okay if most of you believes it's possible for you and then part doesn't. Give all of those voices seats at a table. We're not afraid of any of them. We're welcoming all parts and listening to what they have to say.

Here's another question. What would an ideal relationship with yourself look like? Really shoot for the stars here. Let it be good. What would an ideal relationship with your creative process look like? With your art? With the world? And how can you support the cultivation of that? What are you going to do today to signal that you're supporting that? What are you going to do this week?

Thank you for listening to another episode of *The Art School Podcast*. I love having you listen. I love connecting with you on Instagram. I love the direct messages, the shares. If we're not connected already, you can find me, @leahcb1. I love the DMs. Please ask me questions. Share your wins.

Also, if you can subscribe, if you can share the podcast, if you share it on social media, that helps so much. If you can leave a review, I deeply appreciate all of those.

I also wanted to share with you an exciting opportunity. I am hosting a very small and intimate Art School retreat. It's in early June, June 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup>. And while I will also be reenrolling for the mastermind and that mastermind will have an in-person retreat event as well, I have really been longing to do something in person for quite some time.



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So, as I was researching beautiful places, to me the energy of the space, the design, everything about it, I look for the total energetic package, and I found a gem of a place on Lake Michigan that spoke to me. And I will definitely do more retreats there in the future. And also, this one just happened to have this perfect window when I'm also available.

So, it's June 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup>. This is going to be a complete immersive experience in the kind of energy which I feel creates deep and lasting experiences of profound safety, the kind that coax your soul out of hiding, and therefore it creates a deep and lasting experience of who you really are, the essence of you, which therefore creates a deep and lasting profound and prolific experience of your own creativity.

I think of this too as moving into the space where you are in touch with that which wants to happen through you. I know that our most profound creativity comes when we are deeply nurtured. And this experience will be off the charts deeply nurturing. It will touch all levels, somatic, cerebral, intuitive, spiritual.

It's like I said at the beginning, creativity, for me, is both spiritual and pragmatic. And that includes the holistic pragmatism of us as human beings, mind, body, and spirit. And all of them will be met, deeply met and cared for and nurtured here and the collective experience of five people coming together in a place with this kind of presence and connecting individually and collectively with that which wants to happen already, to me, feels incredibly profound.

So, if this is speaking to you, as of now, I have only two spots left. You can email us, [support@leahcb.com](mailto:support@leahcb.com) and write with any questions or to reserve your spot. And if it is speaking to you, I cannot wait to see you there.

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I wanted to close with the same quote I opened with from Cezanne, “Don’t be an art critic. Pain. Therein lies salvation.”

I’ve always struggled a little bit with, like, negative commands, “Don’t be an art critic. Don’t be your own worst enemy. Get out of your own way.” And all the same, I have kept this quote because those last two parts, “Paint. Therein lies salvation,” really those last three words, “Therein lies salvation.”

Just take those words as if I’m speaking them, because I am, directly to you, within you, therein, within you lies salvation. We’ve been talking about it literally physically, in terms of the neuroscience of your neurobiology, literally within you lies the salvation. That has just given me chills as I speak.

Take those words in. Really meditate upon them. Own them. Within you, within your brain lies salvation. And within that, within that pathway, that’s also the pathway for your creativity. That’s also the pathway for you to experience more of who you really are.

So, too, the salvation is not only for you. I believe that’s the salvation for the world. Have a beautiful week, everyone. Thank you so very much for listening. And I look forward to talking with you next time.