Betsy Kindall (00:08):

I'm Betsy Kindall.

Nicole Fairchild (00:10):

I'm Nicole Fairchild.

Stacy Moore (00:11):

I'm Stacy Moore.

Betsy Kindall (00:12):

And this is Arkansas A.W.A.R.E., a project to advance wellness and resiliency in education.

Nicole Fairchild (00:20):

Hey, everybody. Welcome back to the Arkansas A.W.A.R.E. podcast. We are continuing to talk about the Atlas of the Heart book by Brené Brown. Today we're going to talk a little bit about places we go when things aren't what they seem. Places we go when things aren't what they seem. And so, here in this section, she's talking a little bit about having mixed emotions and then other emotions that are sort of like mixed emotions.

Nicole Fairchild (00:50):

She said in here somewhere, Stacy, I'm trying to find the little quote, but even when it came to mixed emotions that little kids, developmental research shows that the experience of mixed emotions is not present in very young children, and it develops gradually around age seven or eight. Children report experiencing positive and negative emotions simultaneously, and then by age 10 or 11, they can recognize and understand the tension caused by experiencing mixed emotions.

Stacy Moore (01:19):

I want to see the research on that.

Nicole Fairchild (01:20):

You do?

Stacy Moore (01:20):

I do. Because, I mean, how do you assess that?

Betsy Kindall (01:24):

I don't know.

Stacy Moore (01:25):

I'm going to get nerdy.

Betsy Kindall (01:26):

Yeah.

Stacy Moore (01:26):
How do you assess that in a student who doesn't have the vocabulary for it?

Nicole Fairchild (01:28):
That would be really hard. But what it maybe...

Stacy Moore (01:30):
So how do you know how they're feeling?

Nicole Fairchild (01:31):
What it reminded me of is when you were talking about zones of regulation a little while ago and you were talking about how kids would be able to say part of them is yellow and part of them is green or whatever and that they have that ability to identify, there are multiple emotions going on right now.

Stacy Moore (01:46):
Yeah, and that was...

Nicole Fairchild (01:48):
Little.

Stacy Moore (01:48):
Eight? Nine?

Nicole Fairchild (01:49):
Yeah.

Stacy Moore (01:51):
So I mean this is where I get cantankerous with research is because, how can you accurately assess that? How can you accurately assess academics either? But I won't go there. But I mean, how do you accurately assess that?

Nicole Fairchild (02:02):
You're just being a good type one. That's all. That's all you're doing, right now.

Stacy Moore (02:05):
I play that role well.

Nicole Fairchild (02:09):
So here in this section, I just thought that was kind of an interesting little point, but then she talks a little bit about nostalgia, cognitive dissonance and paradox. And here's where, okay, I was having a hard time

because of this. So when the pandemic was happening, and if you go back and listen to, I think it was season two, we talked about... Oh, Betsy, what was the name of that research article? I want to say you pulled it up, not the third quarter phenomenon, but the other one that had to do with we've tapped out. We've expended our...

Stacy Moore (02:48):

Surge capacity.

Nicole Fairchild (02:49):

Surge capacity.

Betsy Kindall (02:50):

Surge capacity.

Nicole Fairchild (02:50):

Okay. Yes, thank you. Sorry. So it was in the surge capacity article that we learned about and began talking about this concept of both and. So we would say the pandemic was both exhausting and scary and hard for so many families, and it was absolutely wonderful to be forced to be at home.

Betsy Kindall (03:12):

Yes, and bittersweet to have that time with our kids that we never would get back again.

Nicole Fairchild (03:17):

Yeah, at really critical times. So both and. Now, here's where I have a problem with what's happening here in Atlas of the Heart, is that I think the way that she is talking about some of these emotions sets aside this idea of both and, because I feel a little nostalgic from time to time for March of 2020.

Stacy Moore (03:42):

Yeah.

Nicole Fairchild (03:43):

Don't come back home from spring break. Yes, thank you very much.

Stacy Moore (03:46):

Thank you.

Nicole Fairchild (03:46):

I will not.

Betsy Kindall (03:47):

Thank you for giving me permission. In the book too, she says, today researchers describe nostalgia as a frequent, primarily positive, context-specific, bittersweet emotion that combines elements of happiness

and sadness with the sense of yearning and loss. The researchers also tell us that feeling nostalgic involves putting ourselves at the center of a story in which we're reminiscing about people we are close to or about important events in our lives. Interestingly though, nostalgia is more likely to be triggered by negative moods like loneliness and by our struggles to find meaning in our current lives.

Nicole Fairchild (04:29):

Yeah, and that makes sense because we're irritated with how busy we are right now. And we're like, dang.

Stacy Moore (04:35):

That's not my first go too.

Nicole Fairchild (04:37):

Go back. What do you mean?

Stacy Moore (04:40):

I think about my granny.

Betsy Kindall (04:41):

Yeah, I think about my grandparents.

Stacy Moore (04:42):

And how I love her, but it could be the quilt that I've got hanging on those. My baby quilt that she made me. And I think about, I love her and she was the sweetest person and I miss her.

Betsy Kindall (04:53):

I do think that there's something though to be said for nostalgia is more likely to be triggered by negative moods because I wouldn't say negative moods, but I think sometimes I feel at times nostalgic when I'm sad or I miss her, or it could be a scent.

Stacy Moore (05:15):

But a scent would be kind of neutral, right?

Betsy Kindall (05:16):

I don't know.

Stacy Moore (05:19):

I'm sorry, not the emotions to it, but the context when it's not necessarily you're in a bad mood and you smell something, right? It's just a scent and then it triggers you into.

Betsy Kindall (05:28):

There's only a few drive-ins left in the state of Arkansas and one of them's in Marshall, and so that's not far from where we live. So we go pretty regularly in the summer. And I definitely think it's a nostalgic experience because there are kids playing. You can hear kids chattering, the smell of buttered popcorn, they're playing football. It's like the all American experience to have that and it brings a level of nostalgia.

Nicole Fairchild (05:55):

I think that what you've just said is a perfect example of what Brené calls... The researchers today describe it as nostalgia. She redefines it and I don't like her redefinition. I think it does not capture what you just said. What you just said I think is nostalgia.

Stacy Moore (06:16):

I almost need to tease that apart, which this may not be the right time. Because when she's saying that, I think of bittersweet too. I think of that word, which I think she has in her book as well.

Nicole Fairchild (06:28):

She said it's a mixed feeling of happiness and sadness.

Stacy Moore (06:31):

And to me that is, Oh, I kind of long for that time and I miss it, but I'm also happy being at the drive-in now. So it's kind of both.

Nicole Fairchild (06:40):

Yeah, it just takes me back. I think it's a both end. That's what I think.

Betsy Kindall (06:42):

It's a both and. Whereas where she redefines it and says, "We in the book define nostalgia as a yearning for the way things used to be in our often idealized and self protected version of the past." I'm not sure I agree with that.

Nicole Fairchild (06:56):

I don't think that's really what it's about.

Stacy Moore (06:58):

But that's coming from an idea that we would need to self protect from the past. That we are counting out the negative things from all those times when we went to the movie theater. I mean, if we take that example.

Nicole Fairchild (07:12):

The beauty of both and is when you have both and, you're holding both things at the same time. With the pandemic, I am able to recognize all of the terrible things about it and I'm also able to recognize all of the things about it that were really a unique opportunity for us in today's fast paced day and age. And so that made me think about this idea of cognitive dissonance, which is what she talks about next. She's

saying that is a state of tension between two cognitions that are inconsistent with each other. So is both and more cognitive dissonance?

Nicole Fairchild (07:52):

Now, cognitive dissonance is what we're using when we do motivational interviewing to prompt people toward change. So her example here is...

Stacy Moore (08:00):

I don't think so.

Nicole Fairchild (08:01):

We'll get there. Hang on, let me lay the groundwork. So her example here is, I should stop smoking but it helps me calm down. It sounds kind of like a both and, and there is cognitive dissonance. Pointing out the cognitive dissonance usually can help people come a little closer to possibly making a change. And then next she talks about this idea of paradox, which is the appearance of contradiction between two related components.

Nicole Fairchild (08:31):

I've just got to say here that I think it's possible that when I think more about nostalgia, I think it may be... Is it paradox? I think it's more both and. For me, all of these things come into both and because I think in this situation here, she's making an assumption that you can't hold both things at the same time and it not be dissonant.

Betsy Kindall (09:02):

Oh.

Nicole Fairchild (09:03):

Does that make sense?

Betsy Kindall (09:04):

No. What do you mean not be dissonant?

Nicole Fairchild (09:06):

So cognitive dissonance is when you're holding two things that are inconsistent with each other.

Betsy Kindall (09:12):

Yeah, I don't think I agree with that because when I think about my grandparents, it makes me devastatingly sad and I miss them terribly, and I can close my eyes and smell their house. At the same time, I'm joyful with the experience of a wonderful life they had and the model they set for me. And that happens at the same time. And whether Brené Brown thinks that you can have those experiences at the same time or not, I am clearly experiencing two emotions at the same time.

Nicole Fairchild (09:41):

And you would call that what?

Betsy Kindall (09:44):

Nostalgia.

Nicole Fairchild (09:44):

You would call that nostalgia, yeah.

Stacy Moore (09:46):

And is that uncomfortable thinking that you need to promote change? I don't think so. I think you're just experiencing it. To me, it goes back to what they said in my multicultural class eons ago. It's what we say about autism. You know one person with autism, you know one person with autism.

Nicole Fairchild (10:03):

Oh sure.

Stacy Moore (10:04):

For each individual. So even defining these terms...

Betsy Kindall (10:07):

It's different for every person.

Stacy Moore (10:08):

It's different because based on your past experience, not that we can't have some collective agreement about in general what we think.

Betsy Kindall (10:17):

Yeah, because when she talks about nostalgia in this book too, she also talks about some seriously negative traumatic experiences. I just don't resonate those experiences with nostalgia. I would think it would be more of a, and I hate using this word, but it's the truth. More of a trigger, but not nostalgia. Does that make sense?

Nicole Fairchild (10:36):

Yeah, it does. Yeah, and I will say to her credit, it's one of the reasons why she's not translating this book. All of her other books you can find in all kinds of other languages. She did make a decision not to translate this book because it's so...

Stacy Moore (10:52):

Americanized?

Nicole Fairchild (10:52):

Well, but a language around emotion is so incredibly culturally specific that she'd be rewriting a whole other book for a whole other culture.

Stacy Moore (11:00):

And not even that, but you think about language and you think about how even there's a book where it shows different regions of the United States and how we interpret different words and things like that. So I think it is a big undertaking to come up with these emotional words to come up with one singular definition that everybody would be like, "Oh yeah."

Betsy Kindall (11:16):

Well in this book and the work that she does, it's complex and that's an understatement. I mean, it's deep stuff that sometimes I'll even read a few sentences and I'll just have to sit with it and think, what exactly does that mean? Because words that she uses regularly can have multiple different definitions.

Stacy Moore (11:38):

But how is that? I mean, a word gets born. How does a word get born? I don't know. That sounds even grammatically incorrect.

Nicole Fairchild (11:44):

No, I think it is correct.

Stacy Moore (11:45):

But a word is born because of some meaning that we can't capture with other words, but can it change? Can that meaning change?

Betsy Kindall (11:54):

I think because emotion is attached to it, that possibly the emotion you attach to sympathy and the emotion I attach to sympathy, maybe varying.

Nicole Fairchild (12:08):

Okay, I just wonder if we are not a lot more comfortable with paradox than most people, and maybe this is true. So she quotes Carl Young here and he says, "The paradox is one of our most valuable spiritual possessions. Only the paradox comes anywhere near to comprehending the fullness of life." That's a great quote by Young. And then she says here, "Paradox is not an emotion, much like cognitive dissonance where you've got two things that are inconsistent with each other that you're holding at the same time. Paradox starts with thinking, but brings in emotion as we start to feel the tension and pull of the different ideas. So in the case of paradox, we're wanting to solve the puzzle." And she has some idea, some examples here of what she considered to be paradoxes, like creativity and discipline, innovation and execution, humility and audacity, freedom and responsibility.

Betsy Kindall (13:07):

She expands on that by saying, there's a quote in here, "In these challenging moments of dissonance, we need to stay curious and resist choosing comfort over courage because it's brave to invite new information to the table, to sit with it, to hear it, and it's so rare to do that in today's time."

Nicole Fairchild (13:30):

She says, "Finally, a paradox is both hard and good." I think that's what nostalgia is.

Stacy Moore (13:37):

Maybe I'm not looking at this right but I think mine would be backwards on the paradox and the cognitive dissonance. I think we use like you said, cognitive dissonance in therapy because you're trying to one over the other, which one's going to win kind of thing.

Betsy Kindall (13:50):

Yeah, or like how are you...

Stacy Moore (13:52):

Which one's going to win out on how you're going to take this information moving forward?

Nicole Fairchild (13:55):

Sure. You say you're this kind of person but you're doing this, what do you want to do about that?

Stacy Moore (13:59):

Right, so there's some kind of decision. Whereas paradox, I think I always assumed was just the presentation of these two sides.

Nicole Fairchild (14:06):

That they're two sides of the same point.

Stacy Moore (14:06):

That there's a paradox. This is a paradox.

Nicole Fairchild (14:09):

Oh.

Stacy Moore (14:11):

I could be wrong.

Nicole Fairchild (14:12):

So hard and good is a paradox.

Stacy Moore (14:15):

Yeah. And then if there's dissonance to it, then there's some special meaning to that. I attribute this to this situation in my life and so now I'm going to have to either sit with that uncomfortableness and not feel like I'm being successful in that or that I'm resolving that.

Nicole Fairchild (14:31):

So hard and good is a paradox when we apply that hard and good to the pandemic and have emotions about it, that's...

Stacy Moore (14:39):

Going to create cognitive dissonance and I got to do something. I've got to figure out how to resolve that.

Nicole Fairchild (14:44):

Unless it's nostalgic.

Stacy Moore (14:46):

Yeah, because then it's both and.

Nicole Fairchild (14:49):

I don't know. Is this...

Stacy Moore (14:51):

People are probably like, what in the world are y'all going on about?

Betsy Kindall (14:53):

I know.

Nicole Fairchild (14:54):

I was going to say, is this too much?

Stacy Moore (14:57):

But that's what I found with this book as I was listening, is it goes deep into different words. When I was in honors college, we had a professor and he was amazing, but he was a big wordsmith and he was like, "Do you actually know what you're saying? Because the definition of that word, and this word comes from this and this is the origin of that word." And so I do have a fascination with words thanks to him, Norbert Shedler. He was an amazing professor but, do most people grapple with that?

Nicole Fairchild (15:27):

Here's the reason why grappling with it is important. That might have got a little weedy for some of our listeners out there, but here's why it's important. It's important because the more granular we are able to express our emotions with our language, the more able we are to do something about it, to manage it. We said a few episodes ago that living an unexamined life is a problem.

Betsy Kindall (15:55):

It's such a problem. For those of you out there who are truly uncomfortable, I think the question is why are you uncomfortable right now? And really take a look at why you're uncomfortable because in our trainings, this goes back to what we said a few episodes ago, is we meet people every day who are really unaware of their emotions or where they've been or how it affected them. I think that's the first step in being self-aware.

Stacy Moore (16:25):

Self-awareness which is huge for social emotional.

Betsy Kindall (16:28):

Yes, and just to being healthy, I think.

Nicole Fairchild (16:33):

Well, and I think too, when you are able to align yourself with common definitions of words that when you say, "I went to the drive-in this weekend and it was just so awesome to sit there and watch the kids play and the fireflies are coming out and you get one of those hamburgers where they...

Betsy Kindall (16:49):

Anything with sugar that made your...

Nicole Fairchild (16:51):

Buttered the bun.

Betsy Kindall (16:52):

Eyes twitch.

Nicole Fairchild (16:52):

Oh, come on. The point of part of that conversation is for me to find a place in me to go, I know that feeling. That nostalgic feeling that I used to have too when we would have all the kids around the neighborhood playing, we'd be playing outside. It'd be twilight, we'd be playing hide and go seek. You'd hear the cowbell. There's something inside of us that says, that was a beautiful time.

Stacy Moore (17:17):

But if somebody stopped me and said, "That's not nostalgia, that's cognitive dissonance." That kind of ruined that moment, that connection right there.

Betsy Kindall (17:24):

I think the importance of doing that or visiting that place is to tap into that part of yourself.

Nicole Fairchild (17:30):

And to be able to have empathy when you tap into that part of yourself and to be able to say, "Yeah, I've had a similar experience. Yeah, this is what it was like for me." But I think all of these emotions are good. All 87 of them that Brené talks about in this book, all of them are good. So here's what we would enjoy.

Nicole Fairchild (17:50):

This is kind of turning out to be a bit of a book study. So if you want to comment and join in with us a little bit, we'd love for you to do that. We'd love to hear from you. So write and review or leave us a comment and let us know what you're thinking as you're walking through this book. Thanks guys.