

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Melissa Dahl | The Not-So-Cringeworthy Truth about Awkwardness

We've all experienced episodes of awkwardness that leave us horrified by some faux pas we've committed in the company of others. Memories of such episodes may even linger over the span of a lifetime, causing us to cringe anew upon every recollection.

[Cringeworthy: A Theory of Awkwardness](#) author Melissa Dahl joined us for [episode 24](#) to investigate the peculiar experience of awkwardness, why it happens, and what opportunities it presents to us if we allow it.

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The Looking Glass Self & The Irreconcilable Gap

Jordan and Melissa discussed *the looking-glass self*, which is an idea introduced by sociologist [Charles Horton Cooley](#) in 1902 in which we understand ourselves through how we *believe* others perceive us.

In other words, we look to other people for a sense of our own self, and it's awkward when we don't like what we perceive. This dissonance between who we think we are and how we are reflected through the perception of others is referred to as the *irreconcilable gap* by psychologist [Philippe Rochat](#).

How can you bring your internal perception into alignment with reality? Ask your best friend to recount what they believe to be your three most embarrassing moments for which they were present.

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Now recount what you believe to be your three most embarrassing moments for which your friend was present. How many aligned? Did your friend remember these moments in great detail or just vaguely? How can you use this to help reframe awkward feelings?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to the prompt above.

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When Worlds Collide

Sociologist [Erving Goffman](#) argued that the elements of human interactions are dependent upon time, place, and audience. In other words, our sense of self is a dramatic effect emerging from the immediate scene being presented.

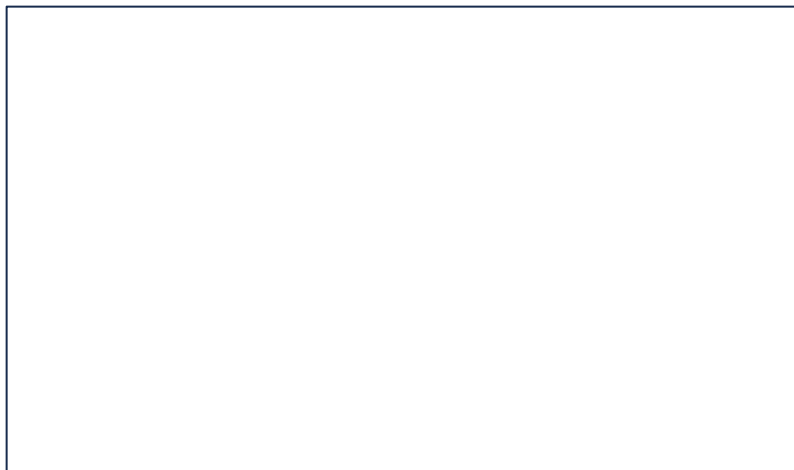
Jordan brought up his experience as an exchange student about a girl who played the role of a “goody-goody” for her parents and immediately started chain-smoking and carousing when she was out of their purview.

Having to play different parts to satisfy our audience's “needs” could create a level of cognitive dissonance if these worlds were to interact...“worlds colliding,” [as George Costanza might describe it.](#)

List some of the different roles you play, and note characteristics that are unique to these roles.

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In what ways could you reconcile these traits so your integrity remains intact as you shift roles?



Redirecting Feelings

Jordan brought up a discussion with a previous guest where he learned that emotions don't have fingerprints. There is no "brainwave" that universally identifies what someone is feeling. In reality, the way you conceptualize a feeling (such as awkwardness), determines how you process it.

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With your heightened sense of awareness, start practicing mindfulness of your emotions. Redirect “nervous” energy by reframing how you perceive these feelings into positive avenues. Perhaps it may feel like an exercise in self-delusion, but with steady practice it will drastically improve your mood.

Using Awkwardness to Have Tough Conversations

Melissa stated that awkwardness can be the signal that shows the gap between who you think you are and who you really are. As such, we can use it as a cue to work on closing the gap while minimizing the emotional paralysis that often occurs. Think of it as an opportunity rather than a negative experience.

Jordan gave an example of a listener helping him reframe the way he approaches certain topics that may be outside of his experience or understanding.

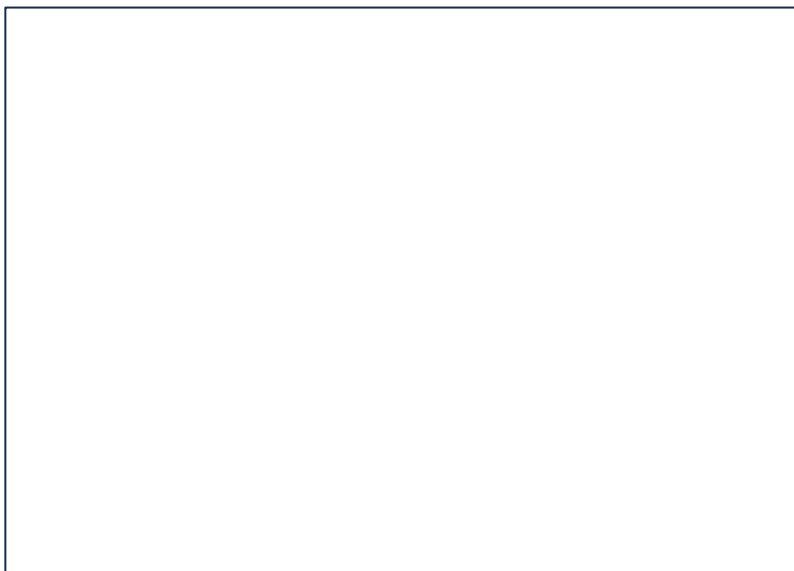
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The awkwardness which created the aforementioned irreconcilable gap helped bring him into alignment with who he wants to be.

Melissa described this as having something in your teeth. Initially we feel embarrassed, but it is much worse spending our entire day looking foolish.

In order to more fully experience what Melissa referred to as “your growing edge,” list some topics that you feel uncomfortable about. Next, practice reframing the awkward feelings on the topic as *uncomfortable, but not negative*. Now, when you are ready to have the tough conversation, approach someone you view as knowledgeable on the topic and determine if your reflected self is in alignment with your self-concept...remembering that discomfort is the place where you grow.

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Don't Let Awkward Feelings Hold You Back

Melissa coined the phrase “the awkwardness vortex,” wherein being nervous makes you self-conscious, which makes you nervous, which makes you self-conscious...in a seemingly never-ending feedback loop. This anxiety can be paralyzing and lead to inaction, but she and Jordan discussed that studies have shown that, in hindsight, we regret inaction more than action.

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In order to escape the awkwardness vortex, we must focus on anything or anyone but ourselves. Focus on the message, or the messenger. Learn to use self-talk (talk to yourself in the third-person...it's not just for crazy people anymore).

At a social gathering that feels awkward, approach someone and start describing the environment of the scene, something that you noticed about that individual, or a world event. After the encounter, reflect on how you felt prior to, during, and after the conversation ended. Did moving your focus outside of yourself help you feel less awkward?

Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here](#).

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About



Join Jordan Harbinger (critically acclaimed host, formerly of The Art of Charm) as we get deep into the untapped wisdom of the world's top performers -- from legendary musicians to intelligence operatives, iconoclastic writers to visionary change-makers.

We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth -- and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these insights into your own life and live what you listen.

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