



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

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## Episode #6: Comparing Lives

*Please note: This is an unedited transcript, provided as a courtesy, and reflects the actual conversation as closely as possible. Please forgive any typographical or grammatical errors.*

- Martha Beck: [Intro Music] Welcome to Bewildered. I'm Martha Beck, here with Rowan Mangan. At this crazy moment in history a lot of people are feelings bewildered, but that actually may be a sign we're on track. Human culture teaches us to come to consensus, but nature — our own true nature — helps us come to our senses. Rowan and I believe that the best way to figure it all out is by going through bewilderment into be-wild-erment. That's why we're here. [Music fades]
- Martha Beck: Hi, there. I'm Martha Beck.
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Rowan Mangan. This is episode six of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. I try to figure it out every day of my life. Martha figured it out over snacks last night.
- Martha Beck: That's true. After about my 30th or 40th snack, I figured out that the way to know when you've eaten enough is that you perceive a blinding flash and then everything goes back. What else do you need to know?
- Rowan Mangan: Nothing. No, you really came to the end of the puzzle. What have you been trying to figure out of late, Marty?
- Martha Beck: Oh, Roey, I have been trying to figure out why I talk the way hippopotamuses do defecate. Is it hippopotami? It's hippopotami. That's a great word, hippopotami.
- Rowan Mangan: I don't know, and I also don't much mind. I think everyone's with us.
- Martha Beck: I think they know what animal I'm talking about.



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Rowan Mangan: I think they do.

Martha Beck: The infamous river horse of Africa that bites people in twain.

Rowan Mangan: So, you're saying that you talk the way...

Martha Beck: See, it's happening right now. This is how my mind works, okay? This is how my mind works. The way hippos poo... and I know I talk about animals a lot on this show, and that's again, another problem I need to take up with some kind of medical professional. But the way they poop is, first of all, voluminously.

And then they stand, and they have these tough little tails, and they flicker them while they poop, and it spreads the poop far and wide. Like, far and wide. I'm talking 10 to 20 feet of just dung everywhere.

So, if you give me something to think or talk about, like, "What do we do for our podcast?" My brain starts throwing crap everywhere.

Rowan Mangan: Is your brain the rhino behind, or the rhino tail?

Martha Beck: It's a hippo. I thought we've made that clear, but apparently not. Apparently, you were confused by the dual pluralizations and it became a rhinoceros.

Rowan Mangan: I just have such a vivid memory of a rhinoceros peeing.

Martha Beck: It was peeing. It wasn't...

Rowan Mangan: I know.

Martha Beck: And it was amazing. It went on for like 25 minutes and it was at a high volume. We could have put out fires with that rhinoceros.

Rowan Mangan: It's a hippo, Marty. A hippo. Don't confuse me.

Martha Beck: Okay, it's happening again. Okay, so like this morning, a friend texts us, as you do, a headline saying, "Cocaine in the River Thames is Affecting the Eels."

Rowan Mangan: No. It said, "Cocaine in the Thames is Another Problem..."

Martha Beck: For London eels?

Rowan Mangan: "... Thames Eels Don't Need." Something like that. "Expert Says."



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- Martha Beck: Yeah. "Cocaine is Another Problem Eels in the Thames Don't Need." A simple topic, well-framed, but then I of course had to google "eagles on ..." Eagles on cocaine?
- Rowan Mangan: Oh my gosh.
- Martha Beck: It's happening again.
- Rowan Mangan: There's a menagerie.
- Martha Beck: "Eels on cocaine." And what came up was a video that of course, I don't have the patience to watch, because what I'm talking about here is having a brain with severe ADD. And that's the truth. But I just sort of slid the bar through the video, and it came to rest on a picture of an eel with the large flashing words, "sex mucus."
- Rowan Mangan: It's true. I can attest to this.
- Martha Beck: So immediately, I don't even text back about eels in the Thames. It's just all eel sex mucus at that point.
- Rowan Mangan: I actually have to make a little amendment here, because there was no eel in the picture. What you literally sent was a screenshot from YouTube with an entirely pink background, and then the rest of the screen taken up with the gigantic words, "sex mucus." And nothing else. That's what got sent.
- Martha Beck: Apparently, it does though affect the eels and it does... See, this is the thing. All of a sudden, now the whole topic is sex mucus. And I set out with a sober agenda to talk seriously about another problem eels in the Thames do not need. I mean, how much trouble is it to live in the Thames without drug dealers threatening your children, right?
- Rowan Mangan: Absolutely.
- Martha Beck: Cocaine is a problem they don't need. But suddenly, we're on sex mucus. And then I'm like, off doing completely different things.
- Rowan Mangan: And so I just want to understand. Your brain is... No. Your brain is the giraffe's tail, and your mouth is the giraffe's backside?



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Martha Beck: Oh my god. Have you ever seen a giraffe give birth? Oh my god. The baby drops six feet to the ground, and the only way the giraffe can get it out... Nobody's sitting there with the giraffe's feet in stirrups going, "Push, Ethel, push!"

So what they do is, they twirl and the centripetal force of the twirling throws the baby out yonder into the Savannah. Fwoom! Clomp! And then they get up.

Rowan Mangan: Wow. That would be a rude awakening.

Martha Beck: Yeah, that would be. Yeah. So this is the problem I'm talking about.

Rowan Mangan: I think I'm starting to figure it out.

Martha Beck: Is like, "Giraffe sex mucus is a problem rhinoceroses in the Thames do not need: Discuss!" This is how my brain works. This is the nightmare that I live inside.

Rowan Mangan: I think you've got a lot to figure out.

Martha Beck: I think I like animals.

Rowan Mangan: I think you like animals.

Martha Beck: I do. I love animals.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. They're lovely, aren't they?

Martha Beck: Nothing else matters. So what are you trying to figure out, Ro?

Rowan Mangan: You know, the thing that comes to mind is that I have been puzzling a little over my propensity to... This is so lame compared with yours. My propensity to want to watch something on TV, and then spend all my TV time browsing and looking at things but never being able to settle on something to watch, even though really, as we all know, we live in the golden age of television.

Martha Beck: But do we?

Rowan Mangan: Well ...

Martha Beck: Because if it were that golden, you'd just be riveted by everything you saw. You'd be like...



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Rowan Mangan: But you know what I do? I do the thing where I'm like, "That looks good, but maybe there's something even better."

Martha Beck: Oh. Oh, there's [crosstalk]

Rowan Mangan: And how can I settle... and I was trying to think of it. So I won't settle on the thing that looks just good, because I am so seduced by the possibility ...

Martha Beck: Of something better.

Rowan Mangan: Something even better.

Martha Beck: The grass is always greener, and so forth.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. The potential future grass.

Martha Beck: There's another Aesop's fable, where... because I just thought of three. You've heard the one where the dog has a bone and then he's crossing a river, and he looks and he sees his reflection and he thinks that's another dog and he needs that other bone. So he attacks the other dog, opens his mouth, and the bone falls in the river and drifts away.

Rowan Mangan: That's a very sad story.

Martha Beck: I think that's a lot like you watching television.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, yeah. And I usually have a bone with me, so it's really apt.

Martha Beck: Definitely. Clenched in your jaws, foaming at the mouth like a hydrophobic poodle.

Rowan Mangan: Wow. There's a lot to unpack in that last sentence.

Martha Beck: Staring at its own image in the river. God, there's a country western song in that.

Rowan Mangan: But the poodle's defecation is your brain.

Martha Beck: Yes.

Rowan Mangan: And the tail of the poodle...

Martha Beck: Is whipping back and forth so it throws a big [inaudible] It's a big poodle.

Rowan Mangan: We've done it. We've actually resolved the whole topic.



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Martha Beck: Oh, thank God we figured out. And what a blessing it is that we're doing this podcast to help other people figure it out the way we always do.

Rowan Mangan: Dear listeners, I hope this has cleared everything up for you. That should do it.

Martha Beck: Okay. What is our actual issue for the week? Or for the episode.

Rowan Mangan: So, this episode, we spoke to Chris, and Chris is a guy trying to figure out why adulting seems to be so much easier for others than it is for him. And he's looking at the old social media, which is a comparison death trap, and all these friends that he went to school with are forging ahead in their careers. And he said he's just still struggling to get through grad school, and not even sure if he wants to do it.

Martha Beck: Aww.

Rowan Mangan: I know.

Martha Beck: Aww, poor Chris.

Rowan Mangan: And he's got two little kids, and all his friends on the socials, they are all happily teaching their kids Chinese and their kids are winning triathlons, and he can't even get his kids to keep their pants on for more than an hour.

Martha Beck: I still can't get mine, and they're in their 30s, to keep their pants on for more than an hour.

Rowan Mangan: Well, there was that sort of behavior as modeled... Oh, that sounds really bad. It was a pants-free family.

Martha Beck: A pants-free family. In Japan, they have bars called "no pants bars," where none of the waitresses wear pants. That's just how it is there.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah.

Martha Beck: At least it was 20 years ago, when I went there.

Rowan Mangan: Pants are okay. No pants is fine.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Sorry, kids. You do keep your pants on. It's just that I'm not the one forcing you to keep your pants on.



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- Rowan Mangan: That's as it should be.
- Martha Beck: I really identify with Chris, though, because we're all looking at the socials and comparing ourselves with other people and trying to adult better. And it's not freaking easy. And I think a lot of people feel like they're not figuring it out.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, exactly. And because in this podcast, what we want to help people do is move from bewilderment, where Chris is right now, just bewildered about why things seem easier for others, just the day-to-day life...
- Martha Beck: And how to make it work.
- Rowan Mangan: How to make it work, how to make it all work out. And we want to get him to be-wild-erment, where he's not reacting to cultural pressures, but actually to his own nature and his own truth. Right, Marty?
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Absolutely.
- Rowan Mangan: So you can sort of see, automatically, right? The kind of cultural part of this problem, yeah?
- Martha Beck: Well, yeah. Yeah, I could a tale unfold. First of all, I always go back in prehistory. Even baboons and... Well, mostly baboons have I studied...
- Rowan Mangan: Here we go. Here we go, guys.
- Martha Beck: That they don't just get worried about, are they well-fed, well-groomed and happy? They get competitive about who's got the most mates and especially the males will compete for dominance in the hierarchy and stuff. So there's some evidence for this even in non-human animals.
- But when you put a human brain on that, what it turns into, I think, is something that psychologists or sociologists call social comparison theory. And all that means is that people don't feel happy based on whether they have enough or not. You know, have enough stuff, free time, whatever. They base their self-evaluated happiness on whether they have as much as other people.



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- Rowan Mangan: Right. Yes.
- Martha Beck: And you can take people who are in cultures where they are subsisting very well, they're healthy, they're well-fed and everything. And then you throw a colonial culture in there, and all of a sudden, they're in there with interesting weapons and gadgets and technologies and a competitive philosophy.
- And then the tribes get kind of infected, almost, with that worldview. And that's happened over and over and over historically. So, it's not just all people, but it's particularly what are called the WEIRD cultures: Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic.
- They are especially prone, for a variety of reasons, to enculturating us with this idea that we should compare ourselves to one another and then get very, very upset if we don't measure up. And it can totally take over our lives.
- Rowan Mangan: Right. So, in terms of Chris, this is... It's not just more financial success or whatever. It can also just be more ease, more sense, like apparently more sense of capacity and that sort of thing, to do things.
- Martha Beck: You know, I think, actually, we all end up doing that in different ways. I think we're so set up for comparing ourselves negatively to others, that virtually anything can become that way. I've had tons of wealthy, successful clients who are really upset that their relationships aren't as good as other people's. And people in happy relationships who think, "Oh, I don't have the career that I really need." And people with careers that say, "Oh, I don't have babies yet." It's constant.
- Rowan Mangan: So do we need it, in some way? Do we need this to motivate us to try hard or something? Is there an evolutionary need?
- Martha Beck: No.
- Rowan Mangan: No?



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- Martha Beck: Absolutely not. Because if you look at, say, hunter-gatherer cultures, it's actually really interesting. Social comparison leads to jealousy, which is a really specific emotion of not just comparing but comparing with anger and desire.
- And it fractures social harmony. So, if you're in a small group, like 50 to 150 people living in the wilderness and there aren't many humans around, the harmony of the group — everybody depends on one another to a huge extent.
- And so, a threat to the harmony of the group is a threat to every individual. So, in those tribes, there's a very strong emphasis on reducing jealousy, not allowing jealousy to be a thing.
- So, say someone is a better hunter than other people in the tribe. And he may get a special commendation like he gets to eat the liver of the elk that he's killed, or whatever. But he then immediately distributes it among the other people in the tribe, and that equality means that his success is the whole tribe's success and he's not singled out.
- And that's a really strong social pressure in a lot of small groups living in the wilderness. And that's the majority of human history. So we know it's not necessary for us to live in this constant fret of social comparison. It's just really, really common because of our particular cultural foundations.
- Rowan Mangan: It's interesting, because what just occurred to me is that little kids are obsessed with fairness. It's like kids come in with that really strong sense of, "If you get to, I get to."
- Martha Beck: Yeah, yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: And it has to be fair and it has to be equal. And then the other thing I thought about is, that maybe there is just this essential striving that we've abandoned for a kind of sense of... What's a better word than...? I guess equality, harmony.
- Martha Beck: "Fairness" is another word for it.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, like just for people to kind of have similar opportunities, I guess, and that sort of thing.



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- Martha Beck: Yeah. It's kind of a shift between... Well, it's a shift between focus on the group as the organism and focus on the individual as an organism.
- Rowan Mangan: So, when we became this WEIRD type of society that you were talking about before, western, educated, and all of that, something slipped in there that gave us this particular psychology.
- Martha Beck: Well, and here's what it was. There were a bunch of educated, land-owning, Caucasian, upper class people in Europe, like in England, who decided to define "equality." And they wanted to get out from under the monarchs and the pressures of the papal system and all that.
- Martha Beck: So, what they did was they said, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal." That wasn't Thomas Jefferson writing. That was John Locke writing in England or Scotland before, in the 1700s, I think, or maybe even the 1600s.
- Rowan Mangan: Oi, fact check.
- Martha Beck: Anyway, it was John Locke. And so these guys got together, and they were fueled largely by coffee. A lot of people put the entire development of western educated standardized thinking down to the importation of coffee from the New World, because all these smart, noble, rich... What, the idle rich? Would get together...
- Rowan Mangan: Suddenly had energy.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, exactly. They would get together...
- Rowan Mangan: They'd been kind of draped over things elaborately to have their portraits painted for a few hundred years, and then they were like...
- Martha Beck: "Oh, Edgar. Go get up and kill something for me."
- Rowan Mangan: And then suddenly they said, "Oh, I have this delightful beverage."
- Martha Beck: "Oh, I feel good. Let's have a chat."
- Rowan Mangan: Yes.



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- Martha Beck: And they decided that they were the standard of everybody having to be equal, but only people in their class. So when you got Thomas Jefferson borrowing that from John Locke and putting it into the American Declaration of Independence, it was because he and the people in his class, gender, race, and everything else, had learned to take that as a really good, good description of how life should be fair. It should be evenly distributed among people like them.
- Rowan Mangan: Fascinating. You can see how that...
- Martha Beck: The problem is that they were not doing the work like care of the old, the sick and the young, growing the food, preparing food, all the stuff that slaves and women were doing, mainly slaves at that time. Slaves, servants, women.
- And so massive, all-important aspects of human activity were left out of the definition of an individual. And then the individuals went out to compete against each other to have all these things like high levels of scientific knowledge and power and wealth and all that.
- And they literally defined a person as a person who does not need to take care of other people, or who will never be ill himself, or who will never be poor. Hence, we have this incredibly individualistic society where people are still competing based on those criteria that those guys valued.
- Rowan Mangan: But as the class stuff fell away and most of us are living without servants, these days, we're trying to do both parts of it.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And Chris, bless his heart, is running into a lot of what working mothers run into, because they're trying to keep their pants on their toddlers and still get to the office on time. And those two things, caring for the young and going to the office, are... They were designed on mutually exclusive philosophies. The competitive nature of our psychology is based on the side of that that went with the educated idle rich.



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Rowan Mangan: Oh, that's so fascinating. And you can just see how it plays out for us now, like even the other side of it. So you've got Chris's side where he's feeling so wretched and bewildered because he doesn't understand how everyone else seems to be doing it more easily than him.

And then there's the other side of it, which is, what are those people actually doing? They're presenting their lives as easy, as like that they're the idle rich sort of thing, that don't have to clean up poo coming out of the back of a rhinoceros.

Martha Beck: I can't believe you would call Chris's baby a rhinoceros.

Rowan Mangan: Have you seen that kid?

Martha Beck: Watched her pee for 25 minutes at a stretch. Well, the other thing is, yeah. People are getting out there going, "Look at me. I just got this fabulous promotion and here's my plaque from the office and everything."

On the other side, there are people going, "And look at my triplets who are getting into preschool at the age of six months because they can all do calculus."

Rowan Mangan: "Look how clean they are. Their fingers aren't even sticky all the time. They're amazing."

Martha Beck: So you have this ideal brew for what some Asian philosophies call "crazy mind." And in fact, a lot of cultures that weren't based in western Europe thought it was crazy. There's this famous story. When Jung, he made really good friends with a Pueblo Indian chief named Mountain Lake. And they got close enough that he finally asked his friend one day, "What do you guys actually think of Anglos?"

And Mountain Lake said, "You're all completely, seriously mentally ill. And I'm not kidding. I'm not joking. You are crazy." And he said, "Well, why would you think that?" And Mountain Lake said, "What are you looking for? You're always staring. You have these staring eyes and you crave and you crave, and you can never get enough. And you're nuts, and we would like to stay away from that." And of course, then...



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- Rowan Mangan: They couldn't.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, because the crazy staring people came and killed everybody and took their stuff so that they would have enough stuff to compare to their brother who was born into the nobility in England and inherited all the land.
- It's insane. And in Asia they call it "crazy mind." Comparing mind is crazy mind. And checking another's status and then bringing it up against your own constantly is something that in meditation... Your meditation teacher will hit you hard with a stick if you do that.
- Rowan Mangan: They will. Yeah, yeah. I just want to point out that we're sort of talking about all of this comparison as though it's an individual-to-individual thing. But I think it's actually larger than that. I think that it's not just this one guy that Chris went to school with on Facebook that is the thing.
- It's this sense that I think we maybe have in the water, which is the sort of unconscious cultural training that says, "How you will be is you will..." And it will vary. Obviously there's variations, but you'll know what your own "supposed to do" was, you know?
- :
- And so you know the markers, and they're just out there. And depending on the variations of the culture you grew up in, if you grew up in western culture or a westernized place, are going to be... There's going to be stuff about education. There's going to be stuff about family. There's going to be stuff about... It's almost like everything we talk about on this podcast.
- "When are you going to have children? What's your marriage going to look like? Will you have a career?" All of these sort of things. And so I think while, on the one hand, we experience those comparisons really strongly when we're... like, social media is just such a killer for this as everyone knows, but what we're actually reacting to is a symbol of this sense of rules that we already have internalized. Do you agree?



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- Martha Beck: I do. And that particular flavor of that that we're looking at right now... because they're all insane and they all make us strive to do things that probably aren't going to cause us a really innate sense of happiness.
- But what we're looking at here is that it also makes you nuts because you feel like somehow, someone else has offended you, or you have fallen short compared to them. And it actually destroys compassion, empathy, relationship, social ease with other people.
- Rowan Mangan: And even with yourself, right? So, it just made me think. I remember, years ago now, getting a call quite late at night from a friend who had had a few drinks at this point and was telling me that... She was telling me all this stuff that was a problem in her relationship. "He doesn't let me do this. He gets angry when I do this, dah dah dah."
- It was pretty confronting stuff, because I knew the person involved. And I was like, "Wow." And then she said, "But Ro, I will not be single when I turn 30." The sort of tacit message being, "Yes. I'm really unhappy in my relationship, and I have an idea about the cultural expectation that it means something about me if I'm not in a long-term relationship at this random date."
- Martha Beck: And what it's triggering is that uniquely human... or perhaps also canine, facility for shame. And people will literally murder to keep their images from looking tarnished. There was a guy ... This is a bit off the point, but this guy, famous case in American TV, where he had a secret admirer. And it was revealed the secret admirer was a man, a gay man, and he went over and murdered the other guy so that he wouldn't be seen as gay.
- The comparison, "I'm straight. You're gay." That has a hierarchical thing, and the shame associated with being gay. And people would rather kill each other than somehow tolerate or see through the shame that arises in us when someone else is apparently doing better or getting stuff we don't have.



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- Martha Beck: It really is... like, from any outside perspective, if a Martian visitor came in or someone from another galaxy, they'd go, "Oh, wow. That's a really serious epidemic problem here."
- Rowan Mangan: Right, right. And so, is that something that you experience yourself?
- Martha Beck: Absolutely, yeah. I was thinking of two things. One is the fact that... Well, I have been writing this book, which I've... Let's see. How long has it been since I published my last one? It's been like four years, and I worked forever even on the proposal, and I had a friend who was also working on a book that she'd started. And then she wrote her novel which was over 600 pages and it became a huge bestseller. And I was working on my chapter and I was like, "It's okay if she writes much faster. It's all right." And she will call and say, "How's your book going?"
- "Well, I've added another page." And then she just emailed us and said she's just finished another novel. She's been off on a writing retreat. She's finished two books and got one into bestsellerdom, and by the way also, hiked through France, and it's pretty brutal. I've finished a chapter and a half in the time that she's done this. And I have been quite hard on myself about it.
- Rowan Mangan: So, it's interesting to me that you're in a very specific pocket of culture here in how you're reacting, because for most of us, having 11 books published already and bestsellers under our own belt, we might feel a little bit entitled to take a while to finish another book. But for you, where you sit, it's the comparison. And I think it's relevant, right?
- Martha Beck: That's right. It is.
- Rowan Mangan: The comparison is always going to be, "Where are you at? Where are you pushing your own capacity?"
- Martha Beck: Yeah. It's almost like there's a little... Think of it as an app that can be installed in the brain, only it's a... I mean, it's more like a virus. It's a terrible app. And it says, "I will look to others as comparisons."



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- Martha Beck: And if I compare in any way that is not equal to what I see, I will then drive myself into shame and all these negative feelings will come up."
- And you install that app, and it doesn't matter how many books you've written. Somebody else is always doing better. And that very friend probably has places where she looks and says, "Oh, I didn't do what that person did." We all do that.
- Rowan Mangan: So, to kind of summarize what we've been talking about, we were trying to show how consensus reality is this difficult thing and gets in the way of our true nature and that we need to come back to our senses.
- So for Chris, the consensus that he feels as pressure is that if you're not at least as good as others, in this case, "adulting," this new internet word, then there's something wrong and you need to be as competent as others and successful as others, as happy as others seem to be.
- Martha Beck: But it really is, as we can see by comparing cultures, it's an app that we've installed in our WEIRD cultures, and it's making us all look at Instagram and Facebook and think that we're not doing well enough, and then we descend into shame and misery.
- And we know because other cultures don't necessarily have this to the same extent, that we should be able to remove this app. And the way we frame it up in this show is, cultural ideas that drive us away from our natural way of being cause a lot of problems. They cause us to feel bewildered, and we need to get be-wild-ered.
- And so, what we're looking at here is the cultural pressure that says, in the case of poor Chris, that if you're not at least as good as others at adulting, whether that means your grad school program, your job, your kid-raising, relationship status, whatever... If you're not doing it at least as well as all the other people at those things, there's something wrong with you and you're not as competent. You should be happier. You should be all these things.



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Martha Beck: And we all live, I think, in some degree of misery over this. I do. I look at social media and I go, "These people are fabulous and they're traveling and dancing together, and I haven't gotten out of my pajamas for six weeks." So, I fall prey to this cultural pressure that says, "Oh, I'm not doing as well." It is pernicious and it is everywhere, Rowan.

Rowan Mangan: It is. It is both those things.

Martha Beck: And how can we come back to our senses? We've come to the consensus of the culture that says we're supposed to be as good as other people. We've seen that it's insane. We've seen that it causes misery. How do we get out of it?

Rowan Mangan: Well, I'm glad you asked. I have this belief that when we're in this particular mindset, when we're running the app, when we're running this app, what we're doing is taking our reference point out of ourselves and into the thing that we're comparing with.

And so, it becomes, "He has. She can." And we lose our own perspective. We only exist as the thing that isn't as good as that. Yeah, so in order to come to our senses, we need to bring that reference point back inside ourselves.

So, if we're shining the spotlight on the other person and feeling like we're small and in the dark and not as good, we need to bring that spotlight back to ourselves. So that's my thing, and I want to try this out on you guys.

Martha Beck: Good, because you were starting to walk me through an exercise and it was working and I thought, "Save it for the folks. Let's hear this."

Rowan Mangan: All right. Well, let's give it a go. First of all, it shouldn't be too difficult to just think of a time where you have felt that. You know, maybe someone's boasting about their trilingual toddler, or whatever it is. It doesn't have to be a parenting thing.

But a moment where someone's life seems to be going really well, and you feel yourself lacking in comparison. And I want you to really visualize that scene and see everything that you can in there. So, look at the room you were in.



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- Rowan Mangan: If you were by yourself at your computer looking at Instagram, see your computer. See the table, whatever is in there.
- Now, as you choose one thing in the scene that isn't the other person. There's a lamp, there's a table. There's even your computer there. Whatever it is. Just look at it for a minute and just say, "That's not me."
- And as you look at the thing, just feel your own heart space, your own sort of emotional center. So be aware of yourself, and your own body, and your own breathing. And now, look at the person who's making you feel like, by comparison, you're less than. And look at them. Say, "That's not me."
- And again, feel yourself. Don't touch your... but just feel into your own heart space, your own breathing, and your own perspective. Realize that you're looking out from your eyes, and the other person is smaller, and your heart is where you need to be living.
- Martha Beck: I love that, because as I was going along, drifting along through the exercise and I was thinking about this incredibly prolific I have, who I adore by the way, she really is incredibly productive. And as I looked at that, and then thought, "Okay, there's the table. That's not me. There's a bookshelf. That's not me. There's my friend. That's not me. What's me?"
- I immediately realized that there's whole range of experiences that I value highly that have been in the place of writing as prolifically. I spend a lot more time in our... just, we spend a tremendous amount of time just communing as a family.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, we do. We like each other.
- Martha Beck: Oh my God. It's like, we have morning communion. We have evening communion. Evening communion is closely followed by evening TV time with Adam, which is followed by us browsing channels and trying to find something we like.
- God, I wouldn't give that up for a million... and it's not better than my friend in any way. But it's like, "Oh, I can live with that choice. I absolutely can live with that choice."



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- Rowan Mangan: Your heart wants the experience of the life that you live, not the life that your friend lives. And her heart wants that experience. And you're an interesting two, because you are actually in that not particularly defined by culture in these two ways of living. And so, the contrast is really clear.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And it really is going from consensus to our senses, because the concept of, how much did you do? How many pages? How many words? How many contracts? Whatever, it's so in my head. And when I think, "Here I am among objects, and this isn't me." It's like an animal. I drop out of the conceptual frame of mind, and I'm feeling objects and I'm seeing colors.
- And then the sensation of my own experience is like, "Oh. That's very ..." I remember the warmth of just spending time in my pajamas with my family. And yeah, I would choose that. So I'm back in my senses and I can love my friend's productivity without getting jealous and anxious and all of that stuff.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And it's interesting that we don't really experience this as a particularly language-bound thing, but so much of it can be addressed by moving out of language in that way.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Yeah, because you can't hold conceptual comparisons without language. And to some extent, the things that we've formulated around story, because we can also... like, the way you select your Instagram posts is a composition based on concepts in the mind, so it follows a story.
- Martha Beck: And animals don't have as much storytelling capacity as we do. So they're much more likely to drop a story and go back to their individual senses. And when I started thinking, "That's the table," and the only verbal thought in my mind was, "That's not me," it reminded me of Jill Bolte Taylor, who was a neuroanatomist at Harvard. Did I ever tell you, Ro, I actually attended Harvard?
- Rowan Mangan: You did, and it led to my subsequent drinking problem because every time you say "Harvard," I have to knock back...
- Martha Beck: Drink a shot. Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: A shot of something.



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Martha Beck: So, yeah. Harvard, Harvard, Harvard. Now you're drunk.

Rowan Mangan: Ah!

Martha Beck: Anyway, I know the atmosphere there. I mean, she was in the med school, I think, and there was a joke when I was there. "How many pre-meds does it take to screw in a light bulb?" And the answer is, "Two. One to screw in the light bulb and the other one to push the ladder out from under her." The competition was violent.

So here she was in that type of environment, and she had a massive stroke and lost her language capacity and it took her eight years to grow it all back. She has a fabulous TED Talk and a book called *My Stroke of Insight*.

But the most important thing for this discussion was that the moment she was free from language and just present as a sensing, emotional and physical being, she couldn't remember who was a professor and who was a homeless person. But she knew who was kind and who was not.

She didn't know what the word "mother" meant, but she knew that her mother's energy was safe, and another person who came in the room wasn't safe, from a very animal perspective. Very sophisticated, very intelligent still, but not language-based.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And you think about that. You think about the word "mother" and how loaded that word is with prescribed expectations.

Martha Beck: If it's not one thing, it's your mother.

Rowan Mangan: Right? And yet, without that concept, there can be this woman that you have who's...

Martha Beck: That's just a woman. No baggage. And she said, "I built back my brain after it being..." She was 37 when she had her stroke. She said, "Imagine having my brain come back online minus 37 years of all that baggage."

Rowan Mangan: Wow.



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- Martha Beck: So, she took out the app, and I hope we can do it without having to endure what she went through. But I think just your exercise can help you just reground in the body, reground in the senses.
- And we always get to this, because that's always... We have a very cerebral culture, and to get out of purely conceptual thinking and into the experience of joy and deliciousness and the happiness of the moment, not sort of the image you display in the world, the story you spin of your own fabulous success. To come home to that is everything. Everything.
- So, for Chris, what I would say is: stop thinking in words. And that's not where I'd thought we'd go with this.
- Rowan Mangan: Or perhaps like, in those moments when he's feeling... because "stop thinking in words," this guy's in grad school, so...
- Martha Beck: Right.
- Rowan Mangan: But like, maybe when we experience that emotion, that shame and that sense of...
- Martha Beck: Yeah. So it's a good time, if you feel the shame, you may be able to drop out of it. Or maybe it's too intense and the app has got you at that point.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, true.
- Martha Beck: So maybe like, a daily centering practice of going someplace where you're either with your loved ones, where the relationship is purely based on what you love to do. Or you're by yourself or you're in nature or whatever.
- And saying, "What do I do enjoy? What do I want?" And it may be, and I've known people who live very, very, very simply and I would think... like, when I was life coaching way back when, "I need to make them wealthier and more successful."
- And then I would use the exercises and the tools that we use in the program and I'd realize they were actually living exactly what they wanted. And that, to me, that's what we should see as admirable. Have you chosen what is going to give you the richest life your own heart, body, soul can possibly experience?



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- Rowan Mangan: And just ready for it to not look like your school friends' photos on Facebook.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And if you're suffering, value the suffering. There are all kinds of things, like wisdom, that can come out of times when you're not totally happy. So, don't use, "I am totally happy in my life" as another point of comparison.
- Just say, "I am moving toward those things that are naturally appealing to me. And there are ups and downs in every life, but I've plotted my course and I stand by that choice. I don't have to feel shame about that choice."
- Rowan Mangan: Perfect. So, as we come to the end of this episode, I do want to reveal the big secret about this topic, which is: Those people are struggling too. There it is.
- Martha Beck: Who would have thought?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. We don't photograph our struggles.
- Martha Beck: No, we don't. Oh, maybe I should start doing that. I'd do better than anyone else at photographing my struggles. So, everybody's struggling with the cultural app, and nobody is probably in complete mastery of it. But we can all let go just a little bit, today.
- Rowan Mangan: Wonderful. And with that, thank you so much for listening. We will see you next time. And in the meantime...
- Martha Beck: Stay wild.
- Rowan Mangan: Stay wild.
- Rowan Mangan: Are you enjoying these shenanigans? We can notify you when a new Bewildered episode comes out. Just text the word "wild" to (570) 873-0144. You can also follow Martha on the socials for all kinds of ways to improve your life. On Instagram she's @themarthabeck, on Facebook @themarthabeck, or on Twitter, plain old @marthabeck. Her website is marthabeck.com. You can also follow me, Rowan Mangan for all kinds of stuff on the writing life, wordsmithing, and honestly, general nonsense. My website is rowanmangan.com. Find me on Insta, @rowan\_mangan.



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Rowan Mangan:

On Facebook, I'm @rowanmanganwriter, and on Twitter I'm @rowanmangan. Thanks for joining us. We'll see you next time.