

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 84: Whitney Cummings

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Tim: Hello, my dangerous, dainty friends.

This is Tim Ferriss, and this is another episode of the Tim Ferriss Show where I try my best to deconstruct excellence in world class performers. That means interviewing people who are the best at what they do, or one of the best at what they do, whether they're investors or chess prodigies, actors, athletes, everyone and anyone who fits the bill of top performer. I will try to dig into the habits, the routines, the favorite books, the meals, the meal timing, their sleep habits, meditation techniques and so on and so forth to provide you with recipes that you can test.

So not a whole bunch of highfalutin, abstract concepts, although we explore some deep stuff, but the really tactical tools that you can implement on a daily, weekly basis to become better at what you do or want to do. And this episode is no exception. We have Whitney Cummings. Whitney is hilarious.

Whitney is a Los Angeles based comedian, actor, writer and producer. She's a multi hyphenate, and let me rattle off just a few things. She's executive producer and, along with Michael Patrick King, co-creator of the Emmy nominated CBS comedy, *Two Broke Girls*; not two broke curls, heard a lot of Ks, *Two Broke Girls*. You've probably seen it, heard of it, observed the advertisements for it; it's all over the place, which was recently picked up for a fifth season. She also wrote, produced, and starred in *Whitney*, which aired on NBC from 2011 to 2013.

Not only that, outside of television she has headlined with comics including Sarah Silverman, Louis C.K., Amy Schumer, Aziz Ansari, and many others; lots of big names. She's famous for some other skills that we'll explore, like roasting other comics and celebrities. That is a fascinating and fun conversation that we dug into. Her first one hour special, *Money Shot*, premiered on Comedy Central in 2010 and was nominated for an American Comedy Award.

Her second standup special, *Whitney Cummings: I Love You*, debuted on Comedy Central in 2014 and she is shooting a third

hour for HBO this August, which is set to air in 2016. In this conversation, we talk about her process for writing, both comedy and other types of writing, the difference between fiction and nonfiction.

We get really granular on how she develops her jokes. I ask her questions like, “If you had eight weeks to take someone, i.e. me, who’s terrified of standup, no experience, to get them ready for a real performance, what would those eight weeks of training look like?” And we also turn back the clock, look at her childhood, look at the things that have formed her and informed her, the mistakes that she’s made managing other people, lessons learned because she’s had massive teams, hundreds of people, which I did not know.

We even delve into some very esoteric stuff like equine therapy, using horses for therapeutic work. Really fascinating. I loved this conversation; I hope you do, as well. She is a very funny lady, making me laugh. So I hope you enjoy Whitney Cummings. And I usually say without further ado, Whitney Cummings but I’ve said Whitney Cummings like 17 times already in this intro. So Whitney Cummings, Whitney Cummings, Whitney Cummings, like candy man, enjoy.

- Tim: Whitney, dear, thank you so much for being on the show.
- Whitney: Thanks for having me.
- Tim: I caught you opening your beet juice.
- Whitney: Look, I’m really into beverages. I don’t know if you noticed this about me; it’s my weird...
- Tim: You do have a collection.
- Whitney: I think I’m a hoarder. I’m really into hydrating, but like cynically so, like nefarious hydration; it can never be actual water. It’s always something that costs \$8.00.
- Tim: Well, beet juice, a lot of endurance athletes are big on beet juice.
- Whitney: That’s what I’m here to tell you, is that I’ve made my transition into being an endurance athlete. That’s my new career.
- Tim: That’s why you’re grilling the American Ninja Warrior competitor who wandered into the living room.

Whitney: Right. That's why I was asking him so many questions. I feel like I didn't make a lot of great health decisions in my early 20s so I feel like I'm over compensating now with things like that.

Tim: Better than going the other direction, right?

Whitney: That is true.

Tim: You're like, you know, I was so healthy, I was so orthorexic, I was a competitive athlete...

Whitney: But do you feel like our parents just kind of dropped the ball? Now that we know so much about GMOs and high fructose corn syrup, I feel like I'm on borrowed time.

Tim: I think that maybe they dropped the ball but they didn't know they were carrying the ball in the first place.

Whitney: 100 percent, yes. They didn't know that.

Tim: So they have plausible deniability.

Whitney: Right.

Tim: They'll be like, it's not my fault that I gave you chicken McNuggets.

Whitney: No, why I smoked when I was pregnant. We didn't know.

Tim: Krispy Kreme, Fruity Pebbles every morning.

Whitney: Exactly. You wanted Cocoa Puffs for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

So I feel like I'm kind of like trying to rectify a lot of that damage that was done.

Tim: Oh, look at this. I just noticed... so I love you. How is that on your arm?

Whitney: I got that for you. I have something else to tell you.

Tim: Just full of exciting confessions right off the bat.

Whitney: That's so funny that you just said that because what you guys can't see, hopefully, unless you're a weirdo stalker, I have a white tattoo

on my lower left forearm that says “I love you.” And I don't think anyone has ever noticed it without me having to point it out. That's so interesting.

Tim: How is that produced?

Whitney: I have another white one right here.

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Whitney: It's an anchor. It's basically this is someone who's incredibly commitment phobic who wants a tattoo but doesn't want anybody to see it. So that's one of my weaknesses.

Tim: Is it done with an electric needle without any ink?

Whitney: No, with white ink but it has to go much deeper so it's more like scarification so it basically hurts twice as much.

Tim: Interesting. I am fascinated by that and tattoos.

Whitney: You get twice as much pain...

Tim: Half the recognition?

Whitney: But half the recognition.

Tim: Sounds like a lot of business ideas I've had.

Whitney: Exactly. The worst investment possible.

Tim: That's fascinating to me because I've never seen a tattoo like that before. When I was in Japan as an exchange student, my first time abroad when I was 15, I became obsessed with Yakuza tattoos, a sort of deep, traditional tattoos that were associated with organized crime. I read about this type of tattoo, which is pretty much exactly what you have on your arm, that would only become visible when the skin was flush, at, say, the public baths.

Whitney: Wow.

Tim: So if they wanted to keep it under wraps that they were an organized crime member but then wanted to scare the shit out of everybody when they were naked in the baths, they would have like full back white tattoos.

Whitney: Wow, that is so cool. It's almost like blacklight tattoos today or something.

Tim: I don't even know what a black light tattoo is.

Whitney: You can do a blacklight tattoo. This is mostly for people that do LSD and Special K but you can do it with blacklight ink so you can only see it under a blacklight.

Tim: That's got to be good for you.

Whitney: That's just so funny because I wrote my senior honors thesis in college on tattooing.

Tim: Really?

Whitney: Yeah.

Tim: I think you also have, if I saw correctly, something on the back of one of your arms?

Whitney: Yes, I have a safety pin on the back of my right arm, which I always forget I have because I hid it so well that I always forget it's there.

Tim: What is the story of the safety pin?

Whitney: The "I love you" is first for you, Tim.

Tim: Thank you.

Whitney: I wanted to subtly tell you...

Tim: Sort of a requirement for podcast guests; this is what I haven't really divulged. Sign the release, you get the tattoo, then we can talk.

Whitney: Totally. Right, I've been branded. Let me do them in order. I got the anchor right here on my risk. Michael Patrick King and I created a show called *Two Broke Girls*, which is on CBS. Michael Patrick King did *Sex in the City*. If you had a girlfriend at the time, you probably had to watch it. He did a show called *The Comeback*, which is a brilliant. Show.

It is so well done, sort of about an aging actress in Hollywood, and sexism in Hollywood. It's just incredibly well written and

performed. We did *Two Broke Girls* together. Simultaneously, I was doing a show on NBC which was a sitcom, as well as a talk show. So I was doing three shows simultaneously, which doing one is already a Herculean task?

Tim: I was going to say, glutton for punishment.

Whitney: I was having a hard time. You become a comedian because you want people to like you, and then all of a sudden you're sort of thrust into this zeitgeist as a public figure and not everyone's going to like you, which in standup is usually a good thing because it means you're being specific. As you, I believe say, when you try to please everybody, you please no one.

Tim: Please nobody.

Whitney: Right, exactly. So the idea is you want to polarize some people but then all of a sudden when it's critics, you're like, wait a second and then you recreate your childhood circumstances. And you're like, Dad? Critics just become your dad who won't accept you, or your mom whose approval you're trying to get.

So you just sort of time travel back into being a kid. So that was really hard on me. Then I just kind of eviscerated myself. I did everything wrong in terms of being a boss and managing my time, and managing people's egos, and depleting myself which I've learned a lot in the last couple of years.

Tim: When you were working on these three shows.

Whitney: When I was working on these three shows. I was the perfect example of what to never do. This was before I knew about you. I'm in a 12 step program for co-dependents called Al Anon and I do trauma therapy; I do all of this stuff, whatever. But this was before I had any of that recovery or had done any work on my neuro pathways. I was using a lot of really old survival skills. I was people pleasing and caretaking, and I couldn't fire anyone, and I was terrified to tell someone no, and I couldn't have uncomfortable conversations. And I was all of a sudden the boss of like 400 people.

Tim: That's a lot of people.

Whitney: It's a lot of people.

Tim: That was not the number I expected but then again, I haven't worked on big TV shows.

Whitney: Yeah, it was three different shows. It's a lot.

Tim: I worked on a TV show but it was very, very minimal. 400 people!

Whitney: It's a lot of people. I mean it was just between three different shows. I have three staffs, 200 each; it was probably more like 600 over the year, and they're all looking to you for clarity and being decisive and just saying yes or no instead of, I feel like, I'm so sorry... I was so apologetic and so desperate for everyone's approval, which makes a great comedian; terrible boss.

Tim: Right.

Whitney: So I was just having a really hard time, and I remember Michael Patrick King, who is sort of one of my mentors, he gave me a ring that had an anchor on it. He was like, just stay grounded, stay in your shoes. Because any time someone would come to me, I would just like abandon myself and just jump out of my skin to try and take care of them and manage and please them instead of just keeping my feet on the ground.

And then of course I promptly lost the ring, so I decided to get the tattoo of it. In white, of course, because being on television you have to go in an hour early to get tattoos covered and I don't want to give up an hour a day, five hours of my week.

Tim: That's five minutes.

Whitney: That's right.

Tim: That's very interesting.

Whitney: Yeah, an hour a day times five days a week. Yeah, that's five hours of tattoo covering which I just don't have time. So hence the white. And then the safety pin was I grew up in – this is not funny. We're going to get funny – in kind of an unsafe environment.

Tim: We don't have to be all funny.

Whitney: My parents would argue a lot when I was a kid. We didn't have a lot of money; I was poor. Safety pins were my toys. I just remember playing with safety pins. I remember opening and closing them. I did EMDR, which is a trauma thing.

Tim: Eye movement...

Whitney: Eye movement desensitization. You can say that word.

Tim: Desensitization.

Whitney: Desensitization and reprogramming.

Tim: Got it. Which involves using eye movements for overcoming trauma?

Whitney: To basically reprogram your trauma in terms of putting the trauma into a different folder, like in laymen's terms. So the way that my trauma therapist explained to me was, do you remember the episode in *I Love Lucy* where there was the conveyer belt? Was it the bonbons or was it bottles with gloves?

Tim: I want to say it was bottles.

Whitney: I want to say it was bottles, and then she was putting the glove on it. Anyway, she explains it as our brains take in 3 billion pieces of information a second. So Tim's shirt is camouflage, and how he feels, how he looks, how this house feels, trampoline outside; that's the longer story, listeners. There's a trampoline that all I want do is leave this podcast and go jump on it. And then when we get traumatized, our brain freezes but the information keeps coming in.

So if right now someone came in and held up a gun to our heads, the information would still come in, white walls, wooden, Apple computer, this cactus, and then it would be filed under the folder of trauma. So later in five years, I'm sitting at dinner and all of a sudden there's a cactus and I'm anxious and stressed out and I don't know why.

Tim: The cues, right.

Whitney: Exactly, and I'm triggered. So it's like reprogramming some of those triggers into a folder that is more benign, essentially.

Tim: Got it. And so did the tattoo come after that EMDR?

Whitney: Yes. When I started doing EMDR and getting into neurological recovery, essentially, from trauma.

Tim: Was the safety pin a trigger for negative feelings? And if so, why did you choose to put it on your arm?

Whitney: That's interesting. It wasn't necessarily a trigger for me; I think it was more like a symbol for me. This sounds kind of corny but it was open when I was a kid, and not in a masochistic way but I would sort of like prick myself with it. It was like a tick, like how someone bites their nails or something.

So I sort of closed it, so the tattoo is a closed safety pin. It's sort of like you're safe, it's over. Because a lot of times, if you have any kind of trauma as a kid, you become an adult and you are constantly recreating your childhood circumstances and having these completely obsolete and inappropriate feelings to present situations.

So I was working with somebody who triggered all these feelings that my family of origin used to cause. And it was just like this is a completely inappropriate reaction. This is an employee who works for me who's trying to get his script done and all of a sudden I'm reliving these historical wounds; it's just not appropriate. So I think it was sort of me really trying to put an end to that story and respond to present circumstances with present, appropriate emotions, if that makes any sense.

Tim: Got it. That does make sense. And the "I love you?"

Whitney: "I love you" is a couple things. My last special was called "I Love You," but I actually did that after I got the tattoo. I'm trying to figure out how to say this without sounding ridiculous.

Tim: I sound ridiculous from time to time on the podcast so feel free to balance me out.

Whitney: Okay, good. You know what, I'm just admitting pretty embarrassing – it's pretty hard to embarrass me but any kind of vulnerability tends to be a little bit embarrassing for a comedian.

I was struggling a little bit with patience and compassion. Again, I'm co-dependent; I grew up in an alcoholic home, which a lot of times we have a lot of trouble with patience and control and we want everyone to do what we want to do when we want it to be

done. That's sort of how we survived as children, as though if I could just organize my drinks in the right row, I'm going to be fine. And I travel a tremendous amount, as I'm sure you do also, or I have in the past and I just found myself getting frustrated with people not doing things my way. I don't know if you've ever...

Tim: That's like every minute of every hour of my life.

Whitney: Okay, so I might have a pamphlet for you. But I think that's one of the reasons I gravitated towards being a writer and a comedian is I get to do it all on my own. I write the material, I perform it, I critique it, I rewrite it. I tour. I do everything on my own because when other people get involved, it's inefficient.

I don't like the way you're doing things, I don't like the way you're saying that, I don't like the way you're sitting; just everything.

Tim: It sounds really low stressed to have 600 people working on projects of yours.

Whitney: I know, exactly. Like, is he wearing flip flops to work? It was just a way to not focus on myself. And I think ultimately sometimes when we judge other people, it's just a way to not look at ourselves; a way to feel superior or sanctimonious or whatever. My trauma therapist said every time you meet someone, just in your head say I love you before you have a conversation with them, and that conversation is going to go a lot better.

Tim: Cool, I like that.

Whitney: It's just an interesting little trick. For 28 days, which is how long it takes to make a new neuro pathway, I would just, when I meet someone, whether it's the lady at the DMV who's making me wait two hours, and essentially it's just the notion that everybody is doing the best they can with what they have, which is really hard for a lot of us to accept.

Tim: Super hard. I'm enjoying this because I've been trying to work on a lot of these weaknesses which I have, which fall pretty squarely right into the impatient dick category. Very perfectionist, very meticulous in sometimes a helpful, detail oriented way; oftentimes in a monkish, overbearing way.

Whitney: Which works great when you're writing a book yourself. But when all of a sudden you get in a relationship or have employees, it doesn't work as well.

Tim: Or have other people involved in the process. You become a problem author, which is sort of my label. There are pros and cons to being a problem author. You get the cover you want, but then so-and-so at the publisher wants to stab you in the face with a pencil, repeatedly.

Whitney: I'm just glad people still use pencils.

Tim: I'm really clawing my way through vocab. I'm decaffeinated at the moment.

Two things very related that really helped me were one, always assuming that people are fighting battles you know nothing about. Everyone's fighting some intense battle internally that you know nothing about, number one.

Whitney: And something that is a battle for them might be super easy for you. My dad, who is not known for excellent advice but he said something to me once that was super helpful because I was having a lot of trouble in relationships where I felt like I wasn't getting my needs met. He was like: you just have to understand how strong you come off. People don't think you need anything so that's why people don't help you.

And it was this interesting thing. I have a lot of weaknesses and I'm bad at a lot of things, but when I'm good at something, which maybe you can relate to, I'm really good at it because I've just worked really hard at it. So I'm really good at things that a lot of people might not be, and vice versa. So I'm like, how come he hasn't finished that book yet? It's been two days. And it's like okay, not everyone reads a book in two days, or whatever it is, you know? Having compassion for everybody.

Tim: Yeah, not something that comes naturally, to me at least. And it's not that I'm a complete apathetic serial killer or whatever. But the impatience is really pronounced.

Whitney: One of my favorite quotes, one of my favorite people is Katherine Hepburn. And in *Philadelphia Story*, I think it was Cary Grant said to Katherine Hepburn's character, "You have no tolerance for human weakness." And I remember that resonating a little bit.

Tim: I find ways to rationalize why it's acceptable but you just leave this sort of string of collateral damage. The two things that brought to mind for me were one, I remember somebody told me if you walk

outside and you go about your day and you meet an asshole, that person's an asshole. If you walk outside and everyone you meet is an asshole, you're the asshole.

Whitney: I love that. That's great.

Tim: And so whenever I have one of those days where I'm like: man, everybody's so ungrateful; they're such assholes.

I'm like, wait a second, now.

Whitney: Wait a second. I'm the common denominator in all these interactions.

Tim: Actually, this is more my problem.

Whitney: Exactly. It's a shortcut. As soon as I meet someone, in my head I just say "I love you."

Tim: That's the starting point.

Whitney: Yeah, I love you, can I please get a Diet Coke, whatever. I mean for everybody.

Tim: Mr. TSA, can you please not drop my computer? Thank you.

Whitney: Exactly. As I'm getting felt up by the TSA guy...

Tim: You, too?

Whitney: Well, I'm TSA pre now.

Tim: That's like third base.

Whitney: I at least get felt up with my shoes on. Another thing that was super helpful, because at least in my field – I don't know the case for yours; I can't speak to it – a lot of people who are in a performance based field, whether it's writing, acting, and this is a huge generalization but you can sometimes assume they didn't get a ton of attention as a child, or need more attention than most.

They have a compulsion to need to be seen and heard and appreciated. And humor is usually developed as a shield/defense mechanism so what were they defending against? We don't know but it was something. Everyone had a thing they had to defend against as a child. My last name is Cummings. That was probably

what I was managing as a child, and whatever was going on in my household. So you get a bunch of really fragile people who have all these defense mechanisms in one room, to constantly show up every day to be rejected because you're in a writers' room.

All you're doing is pitching and the boss is saying no, no, no. And you're just hearing no all day; you're not good enough, you're not funny enough which is what we all translate it to. So a bunch of really fragile, sensitive people in one room who may or may not have done the kind of recovery that I've committed to, or therapy. We always assume everyone works as hard on themselves as we do, but they don't.

Tim: That brings up a couple of things for me. One is I have, at points tried to chill the fuck out.

That takes many forms. Meditation has been very helpful. I do have a simple, daily, morning meditation practice, after two of my friends were just like: you're being an idiot; maybe you should try sitting still.

Whitney: High strung?

Tim: I find sitting still and focus, returning my attention to something whether that's a breath or a sound or a word for 20 minutes a day allows me not to feel overwhelm that is due to over responding to things, imaginary or outside of my control. But what I wonder is, for you, I've sometimes thought I'm impatient but I don't want to totally fix it. I want to dial it back but I don't want to totally fix it because there are a lot of benefits that come from being impatient sometimes.

Whitney: Yes. It's a strength in moderation.

Tim: Or sometimes in extremes. We could dig into that but do you worry, or have you experienced that doing the work that you've done has negatively impacted your comedy in any way?

Whitney: Doing the work I've done? Oh, I see, on my character defects.

Tim: So like removing the shield or reducing that codependency; has it removed some of the magic?

Whitney: Great question. I think the short answer is no. One of my biggest fears when I went into a recovery program, an intensive therapy, like not talk therapy; like trauma therapy, which is actually kind of

the opposite of talk therapy because talk therapy largely – I'm not disapproving of therapy but for me personally, mine has more of a neurological perspective. Which is when you have some kind of trauma and you talk about it, you just re-embed the trauma and it actually makes it worse. So I can't talk about a certain topic for 28 days.

I have to replace a negative thought with a positive thought for 28 days. It's pretty hard work. I get really worried. I was talking to my therapist and a bunch of people in my program, and I was like, I'm just really afraid that I'm not going to be as funny if I'm not as dark and in pain all the time.

And it was actually the opposite because I waste so much time trying to manage unhealthy relationships and having low self esteem, and my perfectionism which can be really paralyzing. Perfectionism leads to procrastination, which leads to paralysis. So I could go a couple of days without getting any writing done because my self esteem was too low; I didn't think I was good enough. Just these old, sort of obsolete messages and survival instincts.

I think it has given me so much more mental energy, physical energy. I have much more balance in my life, now, and I'm much more productive and much more vulnerable, which, as a writer, you have to be vulnerable. I think before, I was so over worked, I was such a chronic workaholic that I didn't have a life. And in order for art to imitate life, you have to have a life.

Tim: That's a really profound statement.

Whitney: For me, art was imitating art because all I was doing was working.

Tim: Which turns into this weird, recursive, funny land.

Whitney: Yeah, self reflexive. And then all of a sudden it's just so meta. I'm sitting in there, and I remember being in the writers' room of the second season of a TV show about relationships. And someone was like: what if they go to a baby shower? And I'm like: no one goes to baby showers. And everyone in the room was like: you don't, but most people do on a Sunday go to a baby shower. And I was like, oh, my God. I was so myopic. I hadn't had a conversation – this is going to come off bad but I'm just going to be honest. I hadn't had a conversation with someone that I didn't pay in months.

Tim: Wow.

Whitney: Which is scary.

Tim: Now pay, not meaning you've paid them to talk to you, but an employee?

Whitney: Yeah, I only talk to therapists. No one else is allowed to listen.

Tim: Here's your script. You'll note the compliments are all in column B, and proceed.

Whitney: I don't hate that idea. That's how sick I am. But yeah, I hadn't had an organic, healthy conversation with someone, not that the people that I hire are obsequious to me and walk on eggshells around me.

Tim: Oh, good word.

Whitney: That is a good word.

Tim: You just GRE'd my ass. That's a good word.

Whitney: Not bad, not bad. I don't use it often but that felt like the right context for it.

Tim: But when I do...

Whitney: But when I do, it comes in with aplomb. It comes in hard. And so I felt like it was really important to me to have balance. I didn't have any hobbies. I got assigned homework from my trauma therapist that I had to do two hours a week chunks of something that was purely fun with no work motives. Purely. So I took up equine therapy and some other hobbies and stuff but it was really a struggle. I was like, I can do that. And I mean, a good hour in I was restless, I felt unproductive. I was making notes in my phone. I'm working. I realized...

Tim: Working on the material.

Whitney: Oh, my God, I'm doing bits with horses, what's the deal? [00:30:00] It was a struggle. And even listening to podcasts, I was always in the mode of oh, I can get a joke out of this. It made me realize how work driven I was.

Tim: So going from burning the candle at both ends workaholic, what was kind of the defining moment where you're like: no more, I

can't continue this way? What was the conversation or the day or the experience?

Whitney: By the way, in the workaholicism, and you know more about this than anyone, a lot of it was business. It wasn't actual work. I was taking on a lot of tasks that I had no business doing just because – I think one of the most important things you can do as an artist or in any field – I can really only speak to comedians, actors, writers, performers – is to get a handle on your issues. Like you will never be successful if you're dysfunctional in your relationships and with your employees and stuff. If you have trust issues, if you have abandonment issues, if you're a narcissist, whatever it is. If you are controlling, because I found – I remember I was so apologetic and I was so afraid to ask for help that I was doing everybody's job. Which ends up disenfranchising them.

Tim: They get pissed.

Whitney: Insulting.

Tim: They feel micro managed.

Whitney: Yeah. They feel micro managed.

Tim: And then you can't ultimately pick up all that slack.

Whitney: Yes. And I'm exhausting myself and making them feel bad. Nope, everybody loses. I remember I was like punching holes in a script, and there were literally 40 other people in the room who wanted to do it. I just had a bunch of employees who were like, can we please do something? We're so bored. And I was like, I got it, I got it. Coming from standup comedy, I'm so used to doing everything myself that asking for help, I realized how hard it was for me.

There's no point in having a great script, or being a great writer or actor if you can't let people help you. So I realized because again, being like you and me, just in terms of your impatience and all of that, it works really well up until a certain point.

So all of these defects had worked really well for me until I had a staff. Until I had people I had to collaborate with and all of a sudden I was sort of a codependent mess.

Tim: What's wrong with you people? Oh, wait.

Whitney: I know. If you were all just psychic and did everything my way, everything would be fine. And so I think when I realized that I couldn't fire someone, like I literally would get a pit in my stomach when I had to tell someone I didn't like their script or didn't like their joke, I realized I can't believe how hard it is for me to feel like I'm disappointing someone, or just to tell the truth, quite frankly.

I was so apologetic and afraid of people not liking me that it was really paralyzing and unproductive and slowed down the writing process, confused employees. I remember in the room people would pitch jokes and I would just say yes to all of them because I didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings. And then I have to go later and change it, and then all of a sudden the script comes out and their jokes aren't there and they feel betrayed and lied to.

A phrase I love that when I first went in to Al Anon I heard someone say people pleasing is a form of assholery, which I just loved because you're not pleasing anybody. You're just making them resentful because you're being disingenuous. And you're also not giving them the dignity of their own experience and assume they can't handle the truth. It's so patronizing.

Tim: It's a Band-Aid that hurts a lot when it gets ripped off. There's a very short book called *Lying*, by Sam Harris, who's a PhD in neuroscience. He's been on the podcast. It digs into a lot of this in a very interesting way.

Whitney: Don't we tell like 30 lies a day or something?

Tim: I'm sure it's 300, 30, who knows? I think it depends on the person or which politician you're listening to. The point being when you tell white lies or you omit certain things, they can ultimately have the same negative impact as an outright, boldfaced lie to someone.

I apologize for interrupting.

Whitney: No, I love that.

Tim: I want to come back to one thing you mentioned. Actually, before I do that, was there a particular breaking point where you were like, I need to address this?

Whitney: Yes. And again, I wish I had lied more, actually. I probably should lie in terms of your response to this question. I got pneumonia and

I didn't notice. It got really bad and turned into something called coscochondritis.

Tim: Sounds bad. Costco?

Whitney: You get it a Costco. The good news, it's really affordable. Basically the infection from the pneumonia gets in the muscles of your chest, which is called pleurisy, which people got in the Civil War. It's like nobody gets this. You have to go so long without taking care of it.

Tim: That and the rickets.

Whitney: Polio.

Then it inflames the cartilage under your rib cage so your chest is really sore. Essentially, I just wasn't taking care of myself because I was so busy. I was sleeping four hours a night, and had to be in every meeting and every editing session. I was writing four scripts at a time and I was just super over extended. I had some family things happen. My mom had a stroke. I had a family member go into rehab and I just had no concept of boundaries. And you can't give what you don't have.

I was the queen of giving everything away; all my energy, all my time, all my money. I would cook a five course meal for you and then I wouldn't eat dinner. I had this doctor say to me, you're killing yourself. You really need to figure out a way to be healthier. And that's when I kind of learned about neurology and stress, and cortisol, and adrenaline, and epinephrine and how damaging they can be on your body.

I was like, I'm 27 and I have three jobs; this is awesome. But then it's all fun and games until...

Tim: Until it's not.

Whitney: Yeah, you have leprosy.

Tim: Until your lungs fall out of your armpits, it's all fun and games.

Whitney: I think to that point, I remember being at the doctor and having this realization because I grew up on *Roseanne*, and *Mad About You*, and *Three's Company*, these multi cams. I loved comedy and I loved comedians and I remember being like, I'm living my dream at 27. I have everything I want for my whole life and I'm not

enjoying it. I'm at the doctor, and I have pneumonia and I'm managing people's egos instead of just having a great time.

Tim: What are the things, and this comes back to something you said about being very, very good at some things and very, very bad at others. I'd be curious to know what you think the factors or beliefs or behaviors were that allowed you to get to that point at 27.

A lot of people will say, holy shit, that's really young;. How would you get to that point from a success standpoint professionally? What were the things that contributed to that?

Whitney: That got me to success? I failed so many times and wasn't deterred by it. I, for whatever reason, saw failure as practice instead of as the end, the finish line, if that makes any sense.

Tim: That makes sense.

Whitney: I wrote three pilots before anyone even read a pilot I had written.

Tim: Now pilot, for those people not in the business, is that a single episode on speck?

Whitney: It's a single episode, basically the first episode of a TV show which has to introduce all the characters and it's just a little different than a traditional episode. It has to introduce the world and be very specific. So I wrote one about the news in 2040.

It was about a news station and the news in 2040, and it was kind of this apocalyptic take on what the news was going to be like. The screen was all covered in ads, and all the newscasters dressed like NASCAR drivers with brands all over them. Literally every other sentence they said, they'd be like: Costco says Cincinnati is 72 degrees; every state was sponsored by an ad, it was just kind of a ridiculous sort of hyperbolic thing. There's a drought, and there's no water, and it was like 180 degrees outside.

Tim: Which may end up not being far from the truth.

Whitney: I was going to say it might just be a documentary. And everyone thought that was kind of insane and no one really read it. Then I wrote one that was based on this book, a psychology book. I don't remember what it was called but it was about the 14 different kinds of personalities.

I wrote about three sisters who had the same mother but three different fathers, and how those three different personality types produced different girls and their relationship. Fox didn't pick that up. I wrote a pilot for Comedy Central, which I still to this day think was the best thing I've ever written. It was based on me and about just me falling in love with a guy who's in AA, and he can't date anyone outside of AA.

So I pretend to be an alcoholic to get in his life. I go to A and pretend I'm getting sober to get in his life. Then I fake a relapse to get his attention in the pilot, and then actually become an alcoholic. It's this really ridiculous premise. And they didn't pick that up but that's what Michael Patrick King read that made him interested in me to write *Two Broke Girls* with him.

And then I wrote a speck for a pilot that didn't even go that was Dane Cook's pilot or something. So I was just constantly...

Tim: Back at the wheel.

Whitney: I see comedy and writing like med school. It's like this is the only professional where people think they should be famous and making millions of dollars two years in. It's like doctors go to med school for ten years, 12 years. It's not that different.

Tim: That's really interesting. I had Adam Gazzaley, who is a neuroscientist at UCSF on the podcast and he was like, I was in school for 18 years. And it's just like, wow.

Whitney: Yeah. I have comedians come up to me now because with YouTube and how famous everyone gets so fast, there's some visibility which I think is great, the democratization of comedy and entertainment. But people three years in are like: I'm working on a sitcom and I don't have an agent. And I'm like: in six years, we'll talk. Get good and then we'll talk. There's this entitlement now of I have ten minutes of jokes and where's my sitcom?

It's like a doctor going for school for two years and being like: I think I'm ready to operate. It's like no, I'll see you in ten years.

Tim: There's an expression in Japanese – I think I'm getting this right – like [Speaking Japanese] which is like “That which gets hot easily gets cold easily.” It's usually referred to people who find a passion that they're really excited about, and they go all in and then quickly drop it, which was kind of my entire business model. I

think that can be applied to so many different industries and skill sets.

So for instance, I get asked all the time because I've written a handful of books that have done decently well, how do I hit the bestseller list? And my point is you can game hitting the bestseller list; you cannot game staying on the bestseller list. And the latter should be your focus. And they're like, how should I market my book?

And I'm like, it starts with writing a good book because that is how you perpetuate the popularity and get the word of mouth. That's sort of a content point.

Whitney: Because the last thing you want is to make the bestseller list and everyone's like: yeah, it wasn't that good. Because that's like the hype syndrome.

Tim: Yeah, and then it drops off. If you haven't built that foundation, it's very hard to have any sustained success. Which is why certain people like Justin Bieber, very impressive that he came out of that YouTube scouting area and has been able to sustain it as long as he has. Granted, I'm sure he's dealt with his own stuff.

Whitney: No one should be famous at 20. Can you imagine if you were famous at 20?

Tim: No.

Whitney: The things you did. And by the way, I imagine -

Tim: My judgment was bad enough.

Whitney: I imagine you at 20 with \$50 million.

Tim: Right. It's like take every bad decision and pour gasoline on it.

Whitney: If I had \$50 million at 20, so many people would be dead. Horrible things would have happened.

Tim: When you do your best writing, whether that's the pilot that you mentioned that involves AA, or anything else, when you do your best writing, what does the process look like? When you look back at the best stuff you've done, what contributed to that writing?

Whitney: It's awful.

Tim: It's awful?

Whitney: It's awful. Writing is awful.

Tim: I agree with that.

Whitney: It's not sexy, it's not glamorous, it's not easy. The more I've done it, the harder it's gotten. Because you don't want to become a parody of yourself. You don't want to keep doing the same things. You get sort of disgusted by your own instincts. I've written that joke, I've written that character. It's gotten a little bit better because my inner monologue is a little bit nicer to me these days. I've worked on that. I've worked on detaching from the negative and beating myself up.

But writing is nasty. I've also gotten better as I've learned about neurology in terms of not trying to multitask. My internet is cut off when I write. I don't have my phone near me. I don't try to edit and write simultaneously.

Tim: Do you do brainstorming or first drafts on a computer, by hand?

Whitney: Yeah.

Tim: You do it on a computer?

Whitney: I am really very meticulous, which I think a lot of people have shame about. A lot of people want to be like no, I just... I don't. I'm not...

Tim: Winging it.

Whitney: I don't wing it. I write things out. I'm very dorky. It's note cards, it's 30 pages of a Word document of just all my thoughts. And then I put my dialogue – the entire script goes into a Word document before I even open Final Draft. So I'm pretty much done with it in a Word document with the dialogue because I don't like to write in Final Draft because it's just harder to go back in and edit. And because writing and editing are two separate parts of the brain, going back and forth just kind of paralyzes me.

It's very easy for me to collapse. I think the most important thing is just knowing your strengths and weaknesses. I know that it's hard for me to stay focused if I'm looking at a Final Draft document and

seeing the names of the characters. I feel like oh, my God, I'm screwing this up, this sucks, this sucks.

Tim: Too many inputs.

Whitney: I like it to suck in Word so the aesthetic of it is, oh, this is just a rough thing. It doesn't have to be good, yet. When it's in Final Draft, I'm like...

Tim: That's interesting. The aesthetic makes you feel like it should be better.

Whitney: Exactly. When I see the form of Final Draft, it's like oh, my God, I suck, I suck. What am I doing in here?

Tim: That's really fascinating.

Whitney: So I've learned how to sort of like quell my own fears and anxieties it's a lot of pacing, it's a lot of eating, it's a lot of going on walks.

Tim: Do you have a set time, or did you... During these periods where you felt like you put out very good work, and that could be now, obviously.

But morning, night, middle of the night? Coffee, wine? What does the cocktail look like?

Whitney: The whole thing. I do not drink, pretty much. When I'm writing, I try not to drink at all. Because I think since I've started eating more healthy, my body just metabolizes – I'm 32, now. Something happened to me when I turned 30 where I just could not drink the way I used to. On my 30th birthday, someone sent me two shots of tequila and I'm pretty competitive so he's like: I bet you can't drink those faster than me. And I was just like, boom.

Tim: That's like the oldest dude trick in the book.

Whitney: I didn't know that.

Tim: It's not that I do that.

Whitney: That's so funny.

Tim: I can recognize it. I'm like, oh, my God.

Whitney: I bet you can't take these two roofies faster than me.

Tim: Yeah, let's have a roofie eating competition.

Whitney: And I was like on an empty stomach. And literally, I woke up in my bed the next morning, and I had 30 missed calls and texts, and people were like, did you go home with John Maher? And I was like, oh, my God.

Tim: And you're like, I hope so. No, I'm kidding. Did anyone get photos?

Whitney: I don't even remember seeing John Maher. I was just like, okay, I can never drink tequila again, certainly. So I'm just honoring the fact that I can't be as productive and prolific when I drink. So I don't drink when I'm writing. I wake up, I have like 30 minutes online. I really try to keep it to four basic sites.

Tim: What are the sites?

Whitney: I always do Huffington Post, I do Salon, I do Slate.

Tim: Ashley Madison?

Whitney: Ashley Madison dot com. Laura Ashley, Ashley Madison and then One King's Lane, which is my sort of thing. And Dig, sometimes. It kind of depends what I'm working on. Because if I'm writing, right now I'm writing a pilot for HBO that's sort of about gender. It's got a lot of science in it so I'll go to Psychology Today, Jezebel, The Frisky, which are kind of...

Tim: The Frisky? What's that?

Whitney: It's like a website for girls that's got a lot of studies, and this many women admit to having orgasms, and masturbation is good for your health. Sort of edgy.

Tim: It's like Cosmo with some citations?

Whitney: Yes. It's smart Cosmo. That's really funny. It's smart Cosmo. So if there's anything relevant, and I'll look at Twitter. I sort of follow all the major news things on Twitter but once I get into that, it activates a part of my brain that's a little too self conscious, and what's everybody else doing? So I try to not do that because I do know that all of this is an addiction and I have to sort of keep it under control. I do coffee, I do vitamins.

Tim: How do you do your coffee?

Whitney: I do my coffee in a Keurig. I do Keurig.

Tim: Keurig. That's a hard one.

Whitney: Keurig. I know. I couldn't say – what was it?

Tim: Desensitization.

Whitney: Desensitization.

Tim: That's a lot of syllables. But you did nail obsequious.

Whitney: I did. I hit that one out of the park. I do it with almond milk and this all natural sugar. I had this woman come in and take all the carcinogens out of my house so I'm making my own almond milk like an Amish slave these days.

Tim: Those Amish slaves make amazing coffee, as long as they tie those beards back.

Whitney: That's right. And I try not to do too much coffee. Then I do a smoothie, which you heard about but it's kind of like everything I need for the day so I'm not worrying later about what I should eat for lunch.

Tim: What time are you waking up, generally?

Whitney: Depending on how late I'm doing shows; right now I'm touring to get ready for my special so on the weekends when I am on the road, I'll wake up more like 10 or 11. But when I'm writing, I try to wake up early. When I was writing a script last year, I would wake up at like 5 a.m. and try to work from 5 to 9 and go back to sleep, because isn't that when our brain is the most fertile?

Tim: For a lot of people, yeah, it depends.

Of the writers I know who are really prolific and put out good work, it seems like they all – there are a couple of exceptions and I hate them because I can't do what they do, which is they're like: oh yeah, from 1 to 2 p.m. I'll kick out an article. Can't do it. These writers, the more common case, they write when other people are asleep. Whether that means staying up really, really late...

Whitney: Which I can't do.

Tim: ... or waking up really, really early. And I was always the night owl version.

Whitney: Yeah. It's great to wake up at 5 a.m. because you're not getting emails, you're not on the mass emails. So I would do that and then go back to sleep, which was super helpful because my [inaudible]–

[Crosstalk]

Tim: How long would you sleep for?

Whitney: My nap game is pretty strong. I believe very strongly in naps.

Tim: Okay, let's revisit that time period, then. So you wake up at 5. You do a four hour writing session.

Whitney: Yeah. Blitz.

Tim: Blitz. You go back to bed. When do you wake up?

Whitney: I'll go back to bed at like noon or one. A lot of times I'll sleep for, like, two hours and then take another nap from like 7 to 8 because then I'll go do standup at night. So what I usually try to do is break my day into two days, like two mini days. I think a lot of comedians sleep really late but if I'm going to wake up at 8 and then I have to perform by 10, by the time it's 10:00 everyone else is winding down and then all of a sudden I have to be hilarious and charming. So I'll usually take a nap at 6 to 7 so I wake up, and I'll have a little bit of coffee and then go do standup.

Tim: Game on.

Whitney: Yeah, game on.

Tim: Very Argentinean. That's what they do in Argentina. I lived in Argentina for nine months and in the tango world, nothing really gets started until 11:00 at night or midnight.

Whitney: I don't know how people do that.

Tim: And so people would do exactly what you're describing.

Whitney: That's crazy.

Tim: Okay, I got it. So then during that four hour blitz, you wake up. Are you still doing the 30 minutes of internet in the beginning?

Whitney: Yeah, I'll do it in the morning. To me, because I know how many interests we all have and how many priorities we have, so it's we want to know what the news is. We want to put nutrients in our body. We want to connect with our parents or loved ones or whatever it is. So I'll try to get that all done as early as possible so it's not looming over me all day. So it's like if I've just checked all the news, okay, I know everything.

Tim: Checkbox.

Whitney: Checkbox. I have my smoothie with all my nutrients in it, checkbox.

Tim: I know during the sound check, which was spectacular...

Whitney: Nailed it.

Tim: I gave a solemn promise not to use that. So can you elaborate on the smoothie?

Whitney: Yes, okay. This woman, her name is Laurie Cohen Peters. She's pretty amazing. She comes to your house and tells you everything in your house that's killing you.

Basically your cleaners, your food. I was going to this super all natural grocery store. I had almond milk, and hummus, and raw edamame; I think I'm nailing it, right? I'm like, this woman's going to come over and I'm going to get a refund. And she looks at me horrified.

Tim: Aghast.

Whitney: And she was like, you're eating this? And I was like, what? Almond milk? She's like, it's full of lecithin and blah, blah, blah. Because I was also having some trouble with my energy level, and my liver was a little inflamed and I wasn't converting folic acid properly. There were a couple things that were up. So she put this smoothie together for me. It's kale, of course, vegetable of the hour, the zeitgeist vegetable.

I was in Savannah two weeks ago and someone was like, are you eating kale? And I was like, kale's officially made it. It's in Savannah. People know about kale.

It's officially in the zeitgeist. It's kale, carrots, kiwi, raspberries, avocado, olive oil, flax oil, some kind of green powder and then we put all my pills in there, which is like adrenal support, cod liver oil.

Tim: Good stuff.

Whitney: Yes, it's good. No mercury, vitamin K, alpha lipoic?

Tim: Alpha lipoic acid.

Whitney: Okay, thank you. Desensitization. Oh, koku 10 and I think that is maybe like 2 percent.

Tim: That's plenty. That's 2 percent? And then we actually make the shake.

Whitney: And then we add the ingredients.

Tim: Right, that's step one. Got it. That all done...

Whitney: So then I feel released of like, okay, I can kind of eat whatever I want all day and I've gotten everything I needed. Because I can be – I don't know if this is the case for you. If I need something to be done, I can't stop thinking about it until it's been accomplished.

So I just have to do it right away. I can't be like oh, I'll eat a healthy dinner. Because then I'll just worry about it.

Tim: Right, obsess on it. Have it on the loop.

Whitney: Yeah, so I know my limitations and I try to just...

Tim: Let me ask a couple of rapid fire questions, just for people who want to get more familiar with your stuff. So if you could recommend that someone listen or watch five minutes of your material, of your stuff – five to ten, let's just say; what would you point them to?

Whitney: I would first tell you to put your kids away. I would point them to my last standup special, as you can see on my arm, it's called *I Love You*. It was part of the advertising campaign, the white tattoo. I would just do the first five minutes of my last special. The first or the last; first five minutes or the last five minutes.

Tim: Okay. So if we take a look, then, at the first five minutes, and I don't want to give away any secret sauce, necessarily, or the punch line literally, I guess; if we look at that, where did it start? What was the development process of ...

Whitney: The first five minutes?

Tim: Yeah, or one of the bits, if that's the right word, in those five minutes. Where did it come from? I'd love to just kind of track the growth and development of that idea.

Whitney: It came from pain. My standup always comes from sublimating or alchemizing really painful situations into figuring out how to make it funny. And so I was in a sort of really codependent, unhealthy relationship...

Tim: I'm going to ask you an embarrassing question.

Whitney: No!

Tim: What does codependent mean?

Whitney: Codependent.

Tim: I've heard it used a lot and I've never been 100 percent clear.

Whitney: That's actually a great question because most people use it wrong. Most people think codependence means spending a lot of time with people, or I can't be alone or whatever, which could be an element of it.

But codependence is essentially that you look to other people to decide how you're feeling. So I go: oh, Tim's in a bad mood; okay now I'm in a bad mood. It's like essentially you're a reactive person and you put other people's needs before your own. It's basically that.

Tim: I got it. Alright, thank you.

Whitney: So I have a doctor's appointment. Tim asked me to drive him to the airport. I'm going to drive you to the airport and I'm going to forego my doctor appointment. Your comfort comes first, essentially.

Tim: Got it.

Whitney: And usually, codependence breeds resentment so I'm going to do this for you and then two weeks later, you're five minutes late and I'm like: well, I drove you to the airport. And you're like: well, I didn't want you to; you offered. You martyr yourself, essentially.

Tim: Got it.

Whitney: It's pretty nefarious because you're masquerading as really kind of nice. When I was in the height of my codependent glory days, I was like the next person who would help you move, and I'd pay for the bill. I was like the nicest person, yet people pleasing is [inaudible].

So then I was like annoyed at everybody for not taking better care of me, and keeping score. It's not a truly nice thing if you're expecting something in return. So it's just a way to victimize yourself. I don't know if you've ever dated someone like this, or had an employee like this or someone who does nice things for you and then gets mad at you for not receiving the gifts the way they wanted you to have them.

Tim: Yes.

Whitney: Which is a way for... You just started this fight and made me a jerk.

Tim: Yeah. Don't do me a favor I didn't ask for and then lord it over me.

Whitney: I just made you a four course meal. It's like, I didn't ask you to do any of those things. And then you get mad when they don't appreciate it the way you'd want them to. So codependence breeds resentment. But it's a tricky thing to catch and recover from because, again, your story is I'm just being nice. So I was kind of in a relationship like that with someone who sort of recreated my childhood circumstances so it just felt familiar. Yeah. So that's the answer to that. But I can't remember...

Tim: The material, the bit in the five minutes. So you pull it from your painful experiences.

Whitney: So I had all this rage after I got out of it. Not rage, but just sort of like I was disrespected in the relationship and I just took... The reason I think I'm proud of that first five minutes is because that was my – I think getting your heart broken is really important, if you're an artist. I encourage you to get your heart broken, get hurt,

fall on your face, make mistakes, thaw the ice, break through the defenses and get vulnerable.

Because I think there is a difference between getting your heart broken and getting your heart broken open. And when it gets broken open, that's where the meat is. That's where you write great characters. That's how you get vulnerable and it's important because I think comedians, we pride ourselves on how tough we are. But we're porcupines. Under there, it's all marshmallow. Under there, just get to the marshmallow because that's where the gold is.

I promise, if you just tell the truth and get your heart broken as a comedian, you will have a house.

Tim: That's a cool way to put it.

Whitney: Yeah. So I think maybe in a lot of professions being tough is what's valued; in comedy, being weak. It's like power through vulnerability.

Tim: The speech that brings to mind for me is a commencement speech by a writer I really admire named Neil Gaiman.

Whitney: Neil Gaiman, love him.

Tim: Yeah. Make good art, right? Cat exploded; make good art. This happened; make good art.

Whitney: I have that book.

Tim: I think I'm quoting him correctly, this is paraphrased of course, but...

Whitney: I think I knew that you liked him because on one of your podcasts, you brought him up before.

Tim: I'm a big fan. I'm a little bit of a fan boy.

Whitney: Yeah, I like him.

Tim: A bit of a fan is like the understatement of the podcast. Amazing guy, too. I met him for the first time in SF very briefly. I had heard his audio book so it was extremely surreal to hear him sound so erudite and extremely British in person. I was like, am I listening to an audio book right now?

This is amazing. But the line was something along the lines of – I'm saying lines a lot.

Tim: You're in a line barrel.

Whitney: I'm on the line theme. But he said when you start to feel extremely uncomfortable, like you're walking down the street naked, then maybe you're starting to get it right.

Whitney: Love it, love it. Oh, that's so great. That's my favorite sort of stuff.

Tim: I've experienced it in my own writing where I'll spend a disgusting amount of time on a given blog post, let's say, that I think is going to kill it. And it just flops, or it's just crickets. And then when I have that extreme discomfort, and I hesitate drafting it and I hesitate publishing it, those are almost always the pieces that do the best. So even outside of comedy, in writing, I find that to be true. Okay, so you take this pain. Did you take notes on the pain as you were experiencing it?

Or did you recall it in one of your writing sessions and put down the bones?

Whitney: I remember actually, and this might be cheating a little bit – or not cheating but I actually remember sharing in an AI Anon meeting something that really hurt my feelings. I was like: and then he did this, and then he did this. And people started laughing. And I realized oh, my God, this is funny because it's happened to other people, and people are relating and it's resonating. And when you tell the truth about your embarrassing moments and show your shadow, a catharsis happens, which is what laughter is.

People go: me, too. The whole premise of that first five minutes was what does love mean? Because I feel like my whole life, and I think just in our culture in general, love is a very confusing, vague, manipulative word.

And this is why I love working with animals so much, is that you only communicate through behavior not through words, because words can be so confusing. Words mean something different to everybody.

Tim: Yeah, and they have no thumbs so they can't open your doors, steal your stuff.

Whitney: That's true. They can't read your blog and say this wasn't as good as the last one. They're your biggest fan. And so love, I kept being in these difficult relationships where it was always like, but I love you, but I love you. It would just undermine all of the bad behavior. And I feel like the definition of insanity; doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. I kept justifying being in bad relationships because of this vague, amorphous thing called love.

So I love you means I hate you. So I was like we all need to agree on a universal definition. I think that was my solution. Because I see so many people getting hurt and disappointed because their definitions are different. And then I sort of laid out what I think my definition of love is, and it should be very simple.

I'm not going to be hacky and do the bit but I was like my definition of love is being willing to die for someone who you yourself want to kill. That, I my experience, is kind of the deal. And if you love me, don't do these ten things that I have been through. Like if I'm in the shower with you, don't pee. It was stuff like that. Like, is that so much to ask? Things like that, and I just listed all of my grievances.

And I was like, it's so great to be able to... That is what is great is about comedy is every time something bad happens, I am now conditioned to go: oh, this is going to be a great show. So everything that sucks ends up being a gift somehow. When I first had money, like I grew up without any money, and I got a car seven years ago, maybe it was. I got my first car that I paid for myself. It was a Lexus hybrid. And the first day I got it, I filled it up with diesel fuel.

Tim: Not the right thing to do.

Whitney: I just destroyed it. It was awful. I got this great joke out of it, though. I got like a seven minute bit that probably paid for all the damage. So now I'm in this place where when something bad happens, I'm like: oh, good, I can use that.

Tim: Material. This is good material. Organic.

Whitney: Exactly. It is the upside of being a comedian.

Tim: I was going to dig a little bit further into that, but maybe I can take a step back. I was looking on Wikipedia, which, as we all know, is always 100 percent factual.

Whitney: Oh, always accurate.

Tim: It said genres: observational comedy, blue comedy, insult comedy. And I wasn't sure what blue comedy was, quite frankly. The other ones seemed a little more straightforward. What is blue comedy?

Whitney: Blue comedy, I take offense to that.

Tim: I'm not saying it's true. I don't even know what it is.

Whitney: It's pejorative to me because... and I'll tell you. Blue comedy is thought of as dirty comedy, edgy comedy.

Tim: Dirty edgy like Dan Carlin?

Whitney: George Carlin.

Tim: Dan Carlin is a podcaster I idolize. Hardcore history. George Carlin.

Whitney: George Carlin. But it's tricky because it's like, again, what is the definition of love? What is the definition of dirty? So for me it's like if you're talking about doing airplane jokes but using curse words, is that dirty? Or is talking about sex without curse words dirty? You know what I mean? What's dirty to you in our sort of puritanical society where sex is still this taboo, uncomfortable thing? It's so interesting to me.

Because I don't know about sex like – I just talk about my personal experiences and my confusion. Because to me, sex is about power dynamics, and it's about masculinity and femininity and just so many primal things and it fascinates me because I think we think we have so much more choice than we actually do in a lot of this stuff.

And it causes the most of us the most amount of pain of any other thing in our lives. Being cheated on or being in love and getting heartbroken, every movie plot, where all the money is spent on Valentine's is all about this. So to me, it's like how can anything be more relevant? So the fact that I talk about sex and somebody calls it blue, I'm like, this is all that anybody cares about; why is this still taboo?

Tim: Why blue?

Whitney: Blue, good question. Like in terms of why is blue – because blue is usually the symbol more for sad.

Tim: Sadness.

Whitney: Oh, yeah. Blue comedy. I don't know.

Tim: I will look that up.

Whitney: That's an interesting ideological conundrum. Ideology?

Tim: I'm not sure.

Whitney: The words' words? The study of words?

Tim: Morphological? There we go.

Whitney: Now you're pushing it.

Tim: No, no.

Whitney: I said obsequious. Let's not forget that.

Tim: Yeah, that's true. I was an East Asian studies major so I can pull out the linguistics words every once in awhile.

Morphological. I haven't probably ever used that in a spoken language before. So okay, that's blue.

Whitney: That's blue.

Tim: Let's talk about insult comedy. You've done roasts before, participated in roasts. What are some roasts that you've participated in?

Whitney: I did Joan Rivers, I did David Hasselhoff. I did Donald Trump. Now, roasts are –

Tim: Those seem like treasure troves of material.

Whitney: It's interesting because whenever someone thinks that, that is always a trap because...

Tim: Because it's too obvious.

Whitney: Yes, it's too obvious. So Donald Trump, everyone's going to do hair jokes. The first comic is going to do all the hair jokes. So by the time I go up sixth, I have to have some other angle that nobody's even...

Tim: Right, you have to think of the butterfly effect.

Whitney: Yes, exactly.

Tim: We start with the hair but where do we end up?

Whitney: I went more for the Russian mail order bride wife. I have to go to a totally different angle or [inaudible]—

[Crosstalk]

Tim: Went straight for the kick to the nuts.

Whitney: Exactly. Totally. I've got to go to this weird angle. Joan Rivers, everyone's going to go after the same thing. And David Hasselhoff was actually kind of tricky because he's just silly. So the angle on him was tricky to get. But then there's a ton of other people on the [inaudible], too. I did that early so I was a writer on the roast before I was a performer on the roasts.

I think it's tricky because I guess I get defensive around that because maybe I have some shame. Because I do feel like they've gotten really mean. And the way that roasts originated was actually the Friars Club roasts, which was a bunch of comedians roasting other comedians.

Tim: Friars Club.

Whitney: Yeah, in New York. It was all comedians roasting other comedians. It wasn't comedians roasting...

Tim: Non comedians.

Whitney: Comedians are very different than normal people. Their brain chemistry is different, their amygdala is different. I have this theory that comedians should not be let out in public. They're dangerous.

Tim: Armed and dangerous.

Whitney: They're just not safe.

Tim: Silver tongued, maladjusted...

Whitney: It just took me a long time to realize you can't talk to regular, well adjusted people the same way you talk to comedians. Because we're like: hey, asshole, what's up? And we just make fun of each other. It's not healthy but that's sort of how we show love to each other is that we rip each other and make fun of each other. It's funny because actually – you'll know this – is that you know Bryan Callen, which is how I know you. You met him on, what was it, Thrubble Tinder?

Tim: Yes. Well, we first connected – it was very funny. First we met on Grinder. Most of his photos did not involve his face. And then we met again on Thrinder, which is Tinder for threesomes. And finally we were like, you know, not that attracted to each other but we share a lot in common. Let's go read some comic books and drink some coffee and be friends. I don't recall how I first met Bryan.

This is a common issue for me.

Whitney: He just sort of creeps into your life in a very insidious way.

Tim: It's like mildew.

Whitney: Yeah, he's like mildew or like an STD. He shows up, you don't know why and you just spend the rest of your life trying to get rid of him. He and Brendon have a podcast, which I think you've done.

Tim: Fighter and the Kid. Great show.

Whitney: Right. And I remember going on the podcast and Callen and I, we were trashing each other. It was bad. And then Brendan, who's not a comedian, and I'm trashing him.

Tim: He's just like, what the fuck are you guys doing?

Whitney: I know. And he's like, are you guys in a fight? It does look awful. And then I'm sort of treating Brendan the same way, and Brendan was so insulted and upset. And I was like, oh, my God, sorry, it's a completely different language. So the roasts, again initiated with comedians roasting comedians. And then when it got on Comedy Central, all of a sudden they start bringing in Pamela Anderson, and these perfectly nice people with feelings who aren't numb to the core and who aren't sociopaths.

And so when you start mixing that, that's when you start seeing people getting their feelings hurt. And also, again, comedians actually are more sensitive than anyone. So when you start having people who aren't comedians making fun of us, it's like oh, no, you haven't earned the right to call me a whore.

Tim: Yeah, you don't have your stripes.

Whitney: Jeff Ross can call me a whore. You can't call me a whore. It's like all of a sudden we have these boundaries.

Tim: It's funny you mention that. There was this piece in the *New York Times*. It wasn't a takedown piece because it was too funny. It was like a parody piece related to Four Hour Body. And the guy was like, it was like the New England Journal of Health or something like that was hijacked by the Sky Mall Catalog or whatever. And it was actually very funny stuff. It didn't bother me at all. But then there's someone who tries to be funny but is not a good writer who slams me, and I'm like no, no, no.

Whitney: You haven't earned it.

Tim: Yeah, if you're gonna do it, do it well.

Whitney: I always say in order for a roast joke to work, it has to be funnier than it is mean. So if it's not funnier than it is mean, it's always going to bomb. So it's like you're walking this tightrope of, like, if you're going to make an AIDS joke, it better be an A-plus joke. If you make a C AIDS joke, you get a boo. Which is sort of what I like – excuse me, I'm getting attacked by bugs. Something that I loved about the roast is sort of the math of it. Because those jokes are all math jokes.

Tim: What do you mean by that?

Whitney: Adding and subtracting a word can completely change the response. They're basically tight cat skills jokes. For example, one of my favorite jokes, because I won't say my own jokes because that would be narcissistic and give me shame, so I'll say one of my favorite roast comedians, the late Greg Giraldo. He had a joke for Ice T once. He said, "Ice T, you're so old, you used your first residual check to buy your freedom," which is just a brilliant joke. But it's all math. It's just set up, turn, you know, those were the kind of jokes we do at the roasts.

Where any other word combination would not be as funny. You know, you change one word... I remember some more – I wrote this joke, it's a horrible, really dark joke but I said – it was a Flavor Flav roast. I was a writer on that. And the joke was, "Flav, you look like what Magic Johnson should look like right now." I wrote that joke, and she delivered it in a way that it bombed. She was like, "You look like how Magic Johnson should be looking right now," and it bombed.

Tim: Just too many words. Like three extra words. It's not sharp. It's a dull knife.

Whitney: Yes. I love the economy of words. You can take two words out and it's the difference between laughing and a pause break.

Tim: I feel like Twitter is good training for that.

Whitney: Interesting, yeah. Good point.

Tim: I've been astonished when I've tried to draft something and I'm like, goddammit, negative 23 red. And I'm like, oh.

But I want to keep it. And then I trim it down and it's so much better.

Whitney: Yeah, concision is key.

Tim: So much better.

Whitney: Yup, 100 percent. That is sort of something I loved about the roasts. Ultimately, I think it's important to know when to stop doing something. One of my favorite Steve Jobs things is what I don't make is just as important as what I do make. Like what you say no to has just as big of an impact on your career. So I did three of them, and it felt like I was getting known as the roast girl, and I was getting known as this mean, insult comic.

And I'm not like that at all. I'm like this super fragile, scared person. I'd be in an airport and somebody would be like: hey, cunt! And I'd be like whoa, it's 2:00 on a Tuesday. People just thought they could talk to me like that. And it would really freak me out.

Tim: That's crazy.

Whitney: People would say words like that o me on the street.

Tim: It's so wild. It's a very unusual dynamic, obviously, when you're public facing and people feel like they know you intimately. And in some cases, they might, right?

If they've read all your stuff, watched all your stuff, they actually, probably know quite a lot about you. But you can have that type of experience. Or like I'll have guys come up to me, like I'll be taking a piss at a urinal and some guy will come up and give me a slap on the back and start kind of breathing into my ear, talking to me like he's my buddy from high school.

Whitney: Speaking of Grinder, yeah.

Tim: Yeah, speaking of Grinder. Granted, I did respond to that for a good time call on the inside of the bathroom stall.

Whitney: I was in an airport bathroom.

Tim: Which surprised me, especially in an airport. I'm thinking security, the guy must work here; isn't that a violation of some kind of TSA regulation?

Whitney: It is very interesting because I think when it's so rewarding to be able to share the intimate details with your life with people and help people laugh at it, or in your case help them with their confidence or their business or their goals or whatever.

Tim: Help people laugh at me.

Whitney: Exactly, people laugh at you. And then to sort of compromise this level of privacy, it's usually okay for me but I just don't have very thick skin.

And I have this theory that the third thing a stranger says to you is always an insult. "Hey, such a big fan, love your work. You're so much bigger in person." Because the third one is always their honest answer; the first two is just their adulation. So I always try to get out after the second compliment.

Tim: That's really funny. I'm an avid consumer of standup, deathly afraid of ever doing it. That's something we can maybe talk about. But it was either Demetri Martin or Mitch Hedberg, I think.

Whitney: Love both.

Tim: When they were saying when I take photos, I like to count to five because that's when people get real. Like one, here it's coming. Two, it's almost here. Three, smile. Four, what? Five? What the fuck? And then I take the photo.

Whitney: That's great. That sounds like Demetri.

Tim: Oh, my God, Demetri is hilarious.

Whitney: He is great. He has a lot of great photo jokes. He's like, "I love camera phones because you can reminisce immediately. We were so young."

Tim: He has a lot of good word play jokes, too.

Whitney: Very clever, delightful, playful jokes.

Tim: "The silent G. Yeah, we use that to screw up foreigners, like in foreigner. I'm right there!" He's so clever.

Whitney: There's a lot of different kinds of comedy. I had a sort of argument with about this with someone recently. He's like, I don't understand why comedy is so negative. It was like, there's lots of different kinds of comedies, just like there's lots of different kinds of music and art and whatever.

But Demetri and Zach Galifianakis and Mitch Hedberg and Steven Wright are in this certain echelon of this playful, tickling sort of ... Demetri, one of my favorite jokes of his is he's like, "You know, it's like people always want to show me photos of their kids. And then I show them photos of their kids and they think I'm weird." It's just little stuff like that that's sort of this fantastical, surreal comedy.

Tim: There's such an economy to it, which I really like, also.

Whitney: Precise.

Tim: It's like haiku comedy. It's very, very precise.

Whitney: And it's repeatable. There's something democratic about it because you can't say one of my bits to someone that's long and convoluted.

Tim: It requires too much narrative practice.

Whitney: It's physical. There's also a guy named Dan Mintz who tells the kinds of jokes that you can easily...

Tim: How do you spell his last name?

Whitney: Dan Mintz. M-I-N-T-Z. He wrote for Louis C.K.'s show on HBO. He's doing something now but he has a great show. It's a little bit blue but he goes, "You know what would be really confusing? If someone was performing an abortion and someone ran in and yelled, 'Abort! Abort!'"

Tim: Oh, God, that is blue.

Whitney: It's very blue but it's obviously a joke. But it's just one of those that you hear it once and you can repeat it at parties forever, you know?

Tim: Not to make this the Demetri Martin show but the one, I think this is all on the same album, too, and I'm blanking on the name of the album. But it's along the lines of, "What does a Dalmation think when he sees a cow? Am I high right now? And then the cow's like, 'He looks amazing.' I've got my tits on the ground over here."

Whitney: It's just like a part of your brain that's never activated, like things where you're like: I've never thought about that. But think about it, people like us or anyone who's listening to this is probably an over thinker, but we've thought of everything. We've over thought everything 50 times. So when someone puts a visual in your mind that you've literally never entertained, it's like being a kid again or something. That's how I feel watching Demetri.

Tim: I was thinking, the roasts, part of what makes them so different now, aside from the fact that you have non-comedians being harpooned by 20 professionals, is that it's preserved.

So instead of being in a club with an expiration date that is the end of the night, it's on YouTube, Comedy Central forever.

Whitney: Good point.

Tim: And a very different sort of persistence.

Whitney: Also, I see the roasts as more of a sport. It's like watching boxing or football or something where you're watching someone get schooled, and someone comes back and fights them back. I think

that activates that very primal part of your brain of kick his ass. It started getting so nasty. I think that roasts are better when you're the underdog and people like to see a Rudy.

But in my first roast, and it was like, who's this girl? And then I came out of the gate and knew what I was doing. And then I had an acumen for it and people started to expect – all of a sudden when people expect you to be good...

Tim: Nothing but downside.

Whitney: Then they think you suck. You're like, wait a minute. You thought I was great when you never heard of me. Now you've heard of me and now you want... Everyone wants to build you up so they can just tear you down.

And then I felt like okay, it's good to know when to go out. I'm sure she'd be fine with me sharing this but in the last Donald Trump roast, Lisa Lampanelli and I, we just cried after the roast. It was just too below the belt. Again, I've been in the writers' room of the roast. I know the math of it. I know we're going to make fun of what you look like. I try to not make fun of things about people that they can't control, as a general rule.

Because it just feels a little too mean, with the exception of some jokes I wrote about Carrot Top but come on. But I regret those and I feel bad about them. That one was just a little below the belt. People were calling me a slut. I was in a relationship at the time. It was just like, what are you doing? This is going to cause an argument. It's so salacious and incendiary that I felt like – it just hurt my feelings after awhile.

And Lisa Lampanelli and I, she had just lost all this weight and they used to make fun that she was overweight. And she had lost weight, and now they were making fun of how skinny... it was just like oh, you can't win. It's whack-a-mole, you know? We were like, I think it's probably good to take a break.

Tim: Switch sports.

Whitney: Yes, switch sports.

Tim: What would you do if you had – this is all hypothetical, obviously – eight weeks to take someone who's never done standup but has spent a little bit of time on the stage. Let's call that person a friend of mine, i.e. just wondering for myself. Eight weeks to get them

ready to do five minutes on stage at like an open mike. What would you do?

Whitney: That's a great question. I would get them on stage the first night.

Tim: The first night? The first day of eight weeks? Okay.

Whitney: Yeah. And this entire, every night for all of the eight weeks, whether they have material or not. Because yeah, the material is like 10 percent of it. Being comfortable on stage is all of it. So I would say just get on stage. I always say the first year and a half, two years of standup is just getting conf on stage. Your material doesn't matter. It's like boxing, you know. But I would say get on stage as much as possible. Because your material in the first couple years, no one's ever going to see it; it's just an excuse to get up there.

And I would also ascertain where they are in terms of their self awareness and opinions. I would ask them 50 questions about where they're from, what makes them different. Because I think a lot of people have this dysmorphic view about what's interesting about them. I have this girlfriend, she's a comedian. She goes on stage and she was talking about smoking pot, and hooking up with guys. She's sort of a younger comedian. It was just sort of everyone kind of does that.

And then I found out she was a competitive diver in college. And I was like, why don't you talk about that?

Tim: Why haven't you mined that?

Whitney: She's like: oh, no, it just seems boring. I'm like, no one else has that. Like, I'll do it if you don't do it; I'm stealing it. A lot of times people don't know what's interesting about them so it takes awhile, because I think we are all so sick of our selves in some ways, or we inflate things and deflate other things and have denial about things. So tap into what makes you you and why, what's interesting about you. It took me a long time to realize that as soon as you get on stage, you need to address what the audience is already thinking.

Tim: I was just going to ask, if you grab the gun and shoot yourself with it before they can shoot you?

Whitney: Yep. I don't know who says this quote, that comedians become comedians so they can control why people laugh at them. It's just sort of interesting.

Tim: I like that. I wish I could do that. I need this skill.

Whitney: I realized right away that people thought my last name being Cummings was funny.

And I never understood so I'd get on stage and I'd start talking, and then I'd be like, oh, my last name is Cummings, and everyone started laughing like she just put the needle in the balloon; now we can move on, you know?

Tim: I saw one of your tweets. What was it? I wouldn't let any husband take my last name unless his first name was Dick. I thought that was pretty good.

Whitney: Well, because Zoe Saladana's husband took her last name, I think I was thinking about it. Because I always say to people, do you want to get married? I just want to change my last name. You don't have to marry me, but can I just take your last name? We don't have to sign anything. Can my last name be Ferriss, please? I am grateful for that last name because I think at a very young age, I had to learn to defend myself against ridicule. So I had to get quick witted.

Tim: How would you do an inventory for someone to figure out what those things are so you can slay the pink elephants before they have a chance to stampede at you?

Whitney: I'm a very direct person. There's a lot of – what is the politically correct thing to say? Is it little people now?

Tim: I don't know.

Whitney: It's not dwarves.

Tim: I don't know what the proper term is. Little people, everyone's on the same page.

Whitney: I think it's little people. Midget's not... the new M word.

Tim: Midget is definitely... yeah, M word definitely not, not kosher.

Whitney: Not the M word.

Tim: It's like calling food Oriental. It doesn't work.

Whitney: I think it's little people. So a friend of mine is a little person, and he's a comedian. He goes on stage, and he's like, "So, I was with this girl..." I was like, your first ten minutes is talking about being a little person.

Tim: How do you prevent that from being – much like going after Donald Trump with the hair – too obvious? Like they expect you to do that.

Whitney: A lot of people say standup is like sex but you have to be in tune –

Tim: Really malicious.

Whitney: Really malicious and violent.

Tim: Sociopathic.

Whitney: And like ten minutes long. Basically, you have to –

Tim: Ten minutes? What am I, Sting? Geez. Secrets of happiness is low expectations, please.

Whitney: The four hour work week, the four minute sex life.

Tim: Yeah, exactly.

Whitney: But you have to understand what their needs are, and be able to ascertain – I say so much of comedy is just listening. It's a conversation. It seems like a monologue, ostensibly, but it's actually a conversation. So you're constantly checking in with them. I always tell a lot of comedians who, in the beginning, aren't doing well, and I'm like are you making eye contact with the people in the crowd? And they're always like, no. And I'm like, oh, it's so intimate. I literally look all of them in the eyes all the time. You're constantly checking in, constantly checking in.

The sound is one thing but you also have to be checking in with them and knowing what they need from you, you know? And so for me, the first couple years, I had to address the last name Cummings in the beginning. Everyone was like: cool, we don't have to think about this anymore. Because other people were like, did she just say Cummings? Is her last name Cummings? And then they're distracted. So you just have to take it off the table. Can we

move on, here? Okay, my last name is Cummings; now let's get to some other stuff.

Tim: It's one of these things where you think it's going to get old. I'll tell you what it is. It's Jim Gaffigan's voice that he does to imitate the crowd. He's so pale.

Whitney: Yes, that's exactly it. It's so empowering. That's freedom.

Tim: It's such a clean, kind of elegant way to just nail it.

Whitney: The audience is in a monologue. It's so great because it takes the elephant, like you said, out of the living room. Another thing I did recently, and just when I thought okay, enough people know me.. this is such a weird thing to say. I take good care of my skin, I try, at least.

Tim: One of the crowd questions was how do you get your skin so glowing. So maybe you could explain.

Whitney: Maybe we should talk about that. But sometimes on stage, I look really shiny.

Tim: Like I look all the time.

Whitney: I can't totally but you look –

Tim: You can't see my face because the sun's in your eyes.

Whitney: You're just like an orb of light. But the same is with me. So I get really shiny. And then one time I was on stage, and I was like, "Do I look really shiny?" And everyone just burst out laughing because it was like the elephant in the living room. I'm like, why is she wet? Did she just come in from a storm? And I was like, "Oh, my God, you guys, I'm not wearing any makeup and I put oil on before I came on stage." And everyone was like oh! Now we can talk about ...

Tim: Now we can move on. Now I can pay attention to what you're saying.

Whitney: Totally. So it's like just sort of being able to have that kind of self awareness, which it's hard because you want self awareness but you don't want self absorption. You want to be able to self reflect but not be a narcissist. It's a delicate balance.

Tim: Who are some comedians who come to mind, like right off the bat; I mean there are a lot of really good comedians out there but just like offhand, people who are good at walking that tight rope between self aware and self absorbed?

Whitney: Good, good, great question.

Tim: Dave Attell?

Whitney: Dave Attelle I couldn't have more love for Dave Attell. But it's weird. I feel like he doesn't penetrate too much emotionally. I feel like Dave's not super vulnerable, at least on stage. Off stage, he is. But I would say, like, Bill Burr.

Tim: Bill Burr.

Whitney: Bill Burr is a monster, and he has this great ability to – you know, on stage is somewhat obsessive and neurotic, and he's got podcasts and gets really obsessed with things. But he's able to move on real quickly and not make it about him. He's not myopic.

Tim: He's really good at responding to the crowd, too. When he'll say something and everyone will go, [gasp] and he'll go, ooh.

Whitney: Ooh.

Tim: “Did I lose you? You were with me and now I feel like you're pulling back.”

Whitney: I love when he does that because – and maybe this will interest your fans, that he is one of my favorite comedians to watch because he will almost ordain a bombing because he's so successful now, and I'll see him on stage and just be killing it. He's like: that wasn't that funny, you're laughing and... because he wants –

Tim: He'll like premeditate bombing, meaning –

Whitney: He'll be like, “Black people are different.” And people go [gasp] and he'll be like just let me – he'll throw out something so incendiary that he loses the crowd on purpose just so he can get them back.

Tim: That's amazing.

Whitney: Which is so cool because it's like what do you do when you're that skilled. So you don't plateau, you have to keep creating...

Tim: It's like Roy Jones Jr at his peak when he would just like drop his arms and do these rooster-fighting postures. Because he's like, how do I make this interesting for myself?

Whitney: 100 percent. That's exactly it. Doesn't Laird Hamilton swim with a cement block?

Tim: He does exercise in pools underwater with weights.

Whitney: Something like where you're like: you're just bored at this point. So I'll see him, he'll throw something out where he'll be like, "Maybe the holocaust was good for us," and everyone's like [gasp] and he's like, "Well..." and then he gets them back, you know?

And it's like he'll throw something out that you think is like the point of no return; you think his career is over. And then he gets them back. He's so cool.

Tim: Yeah, amazing.

Whitney: But he's not like, you know, a narcissist. He's not stuck in his own – I think one of the biggest dangers as a comedian, and I always worry about comedians who aren't friends with other comedians because we check each other and keep each other sane. It's when comedians get too sequestered, or any big personality or someone with opinions who ends up being surrounded by staff.

You know, the Jim Carreys of the world who get sequestered and all of a sudden they have no point of reference with reality and they kind of lose touch. So Bill is also great about it. He's in the trenches, he's the comedy star every night, he's talking to people. That's part of the reason I think his comedy is so incisive.

Tim: Who are some of the most underrated comedians?

Whitney: Great question. Sebastian Maniscalco.

Tim: That's a hell of a name.

Whitney: It's a hell of a name. I'll send you his name.

Tim: How do you spell his last name?

Whitney: M-A-N-I-S-C-A-L-C-O. I encourage any creative people to watch him because he is –

Tim: Sebastian Maniscalco.

Whitney: Maniscalco. He has some Italian blood. He's almost like a Brian Regan, or like a more flamboyant Jerry Seinfeld. He's completely clean. He's one of my favorite comedians so I hope this doesn't come off pejorative but he almost doesn't have jokes, per se. Like if you were to transcribe his act, you wouldn't see jokes. It's so much in his performance. And essentially his sort of thing is just disgust with humanity. And I'm not going to embarrass myself by doing his act, but he'll be like, "So, anybody have the blue ray?"

And he'll just say facts about the blue ray. His point of view is so specific and authentic, and he's so genuinely angry that it's just hilarious. So it's like whatever you are, be that. If you're annoying, be that. If you're Republican, be that. Whatever it is...

Tim: Exaggerate what you already are.

Whitney: As long as you're pretending to be someone you're not, the audience knows. So standup is the ultimate exercise in accepting exactly who you are, as ugly as it is, as long as you tell the truth, they're in. Most people can tell when you're... which is why equine therapy has actually been really helpful for me.

Tim: Talk to me more about the horses, what's going on. So Maniscalco, I'll definitely check out.

Whitney: Oh, yeah, Sebastian Maniscalco. If any comedy nerds want to know more underrated people, Sebastian Maniscalco is great. Jerrod Carmichael is great.

You're going to be hearing his name a lot more, soon. Natasha Leggero is very funny. Tig Notaro, I'm sure you guys all know her by now. Chris D'Elia, I'm a fan. You probably already know him. Bryan Callen is actually overrated, I would say.

Tim: This is where your retractable claws come out to eviscerate our friend in common. You're like, I know he's our friend; that's why I'm going to publicly humiliate him.

Whitney: Neil Brennan, co-creator of the Chappelle Show with Dave Chappelle and has now started doing standup and is super incisive

and funny. Commentary on race and gender that very few white people can get away with.

Tim: Yes, that's hard to get away with, very hard to get away with. Especially if you look like me, an American history X. It's just like you're kind of asking for very unfavorable media coverage.

Whitney: I was going to say American Psycho.

Tim: You know, I'll take it. That must be because my skin is so luscious.

Whitney: Yeah, between your skin and my skin, we need to turn the A/C on.

Tim: So I will come back to the equine therapy. But before we get there, I want to come back to the eight week training program.

Whitney: Right, for your friend.

Tim: For my friend, Jim Saras. And I'm probably not the only person with this insecurity but I don't feel like a very funny person.

Whitney: That's fine.

Tim: So for instance, there are certain circumstances, and literally like maybe three, where I'm like someday if I ever do standup, this could be funny. But there are so few of them, that I'm like, wow, I'd be road kill if I tried to go up for five minutes. And actually one of them, earlier before we started recording, you came out of the bathroom and you're like, I just wanted to say I did not create the mess in there.

My thing has been like what do you do when you walk into the bathroom and some bashful person comes out and scurries away. And then you walk in you're like, this is a fucking disaster. But like in an airplane, somebody's behind me, do I fucking clean it up or do I leave it? Like I'm not going to have a conversation afterwards.

Whitney: That's hilarious. That's great.

Tim: Right, but I only have like two or three of those over several decades of being on the planet. How do you come up with...

Whitney: Here's the good news, which you'll love, is it's a muscle. So the more you work it, the stronger it gets and then you'll be like me, and you'll be haunted by everything you look at. All you can think

of is how to make it a joke. It starts being more and more, and then you're up at night and you're having sex with someone, and you're like, this would be a good joke. And you're like, oh, my God, can I just get a second of peace?

Tim: Snap out of it.

Whitney: Yeah, so it starts becoming pretty relentless. But yeah, it's a muscle, like any muscle. The first couple weeks you go to the gym, you're going to be a little sore, it's going to be hard.

Tim: So if it's a muscle, what does the workout look like? What are potential exercises?

Whitney: Potential exercises, I remember when I first started, I would go around my house and be like: trash can, what's funny about a trash can? I think the best way to do it, which also helps to, what's the word when you... I'm making weird...

Tim: Pet. Fondle. You're making hand gestures that looks like a squid.

Whitney: Cultivate. Cultivate.

Tim: Cultivate. Alright.

Whitney: Cultivate. When you cultivate your voice, figure out what interests you. So what I would first do is figure out what pisses you off. So people's limitations piss you off, the airport bathrooms piss you off. What pisses you off? Because I always say comedy is, for the most part, just an obsession with injustice. So most comedians have a very deep obsession with injustice: this isn't fair.

And that's what we get on stage and talk about, unless you're Demetri Martin or Mitch Hedberg and you're doing those one liner, sort of more playful, surreal jokes. So what pisses you off? And Louis C.K. says if you think about something more than three times a week, you have to write about it.

Tim: Oh, I like that.

Whitney: Yeah. What's haunting you, what's plaguing you, what's pissing you off?

What do you spend most of your time think about anyway? So you can't stand your ex-boyfriend, or your ex-girlfriend, and she's posting photos on Facebook, anything that pisses you off.

Tim: Just because I was on Grinder once does not mean I have a boyfriend; let's be clear.

Whitney: There you go, whatever it is. I know you're not monogamous; that's what they say on the message boards on Grinder. I did some research. So it's actually whereas I think most – and it's interesting. I listened to one of your podcast episodes where you talked about negative thinking. There's positive thinking, but then there's – I'm going to botch it and plagiarize it horribly but the power of negative thinking to prevent – or something?

Tim: Yeah, rehearsing the worst case scenarios.

Whitney: Scenarios to avoid them, which is so cool to me. So I always say that comedy is like a very delicate combination of positive thinking and incredibly negative thinking because you take the toilet thing, and then you times it by a million and you go to its worst extreme.

What's the worst possible thing that could happen, the catastrophe, and then you make it a joke.

Tim: You mentioned Louis C.K. I feel like he has gotten a lot better at infusing the positive. Again, this is just going from some of his albums, which are still very funny, but then getting on, say, a late night show and talking about everything's awesome and nobody's happy.

Whitney: Yeah, a brilliant joke.

Tim: And like the WiFi on the airplane.

Whitney: It's interesting because comedians are also human beings who grow and change. So a lot of people say about Howard Stern in the '90s, he was much angrier because he was in a bad marriage. And now he's in a great marriage and he's much happier. I think you have to be very flexible in your standup. So my first hour, I was 26 or something so I wasn't even a person yet, but I was very, like, I thought I was right about everything. You know, in your 20s you think you know everything. I was loud.

And then my second special, life had kicked my ass a little bit and I was more humble, and I was more like, I don't know anything and my next special is even more – so all of my specials, it's a different person in each one. Louis C.K., I think now that he's gotten so successful and so exalted and lauded, he's just a different

guy than he was ten years ago. He has less anger and he's able to come from a different perspective. So I also think it's important to not become a parody of yourself and to be able to be flexible.

Tim: That's why when people ask me, for instance, how would you edit your first book if you went back to edit it, and this has come up because the tenth anniversary is coming up in about two years. And my answer is almost always I wouldn't edit much because I wrote it when I was 29, and I was in a different place and my perspectives have shifted a bit. But that book strikes a cord with a lot of people who are facing similar things.

If I tried to rewrite it now, I don't have the kind of boots on the ground experience with those issues right now to the extent that I did then, and I would fuck it up. I would rob it of that immediate relevance.

Whitney: That's interesting.

Tim: What would you do night of? So eight weeks pass, got a crowd, not just your mom, not just your friends.

Whitney: And this is for the novice?

Tim: This is for the novice you've taken from ground zero over eight weeks.

Whitney: But just so you know, over the eight weeks I'm having them go up every night, whether they're bombing or not, three spots a night at least. When I started, I was –

Tim: Three spots? What does that mean? Three locations?

Whitney: Go on stage three times

Tim: A night?

Whitney: So you're driving to three different things.

Tim: Wow.

Whitney: Three different clubs, you're driving to a club, to a coffee house, to a bowling alley. When I first started for the first three years, I was doing bowling alleys, parking lots, sushi restaurants...

Tim: Just like walk up to people when they're trying to unlock their car?

Just ambush them?

Whitney: What is the deal with these?

Tim: Probably easier for you to get away with. The drunk guy's like, hey...

Whitney: I got shanked a couple times. I got maced. But no, in LA – and this was the time of Myspace so this was the time when there were all these shows at restaurants and bowling alleys, and laundromats and people would just do these sort of shows everywhere. And I would say, can I get on? And you just had to constantly hustle, and you're Myspacing all day to get spots, and then driving around all day and all night to do them; sometimes three minutes, sometimes whatever.

And your first minute is going to make or break you, for the most part, if you're doing a short set. So doing a three minute set is enough practice because that first minute is the key. It's like a first impression of anything. If you get on stage and you have power and you have status, it doesn't really matter after that. But if you go on stage apologetic and scared and codependent, even the best material is going to bomb.

Tim: You're done.

Whitney: Yeah. So I say that first minute is what counts the most.

So doing three spots a night for eight weeks, and recording your sets and listening to them, not only to get it into your memory but also to see what's really getting laughs. Sometimes we hear that we're bombing when we're actually getting laughs, or we hear that laughs are smaller. It's just important to listen to it back objectively, later when you're not in the deer in the headlights.

Tim: The whole [inaudible]–

[Crosstalk]

Whitney: Yes. And then the day of, when I do an hour at night or when I do two hours a night, when I'm getting ready for my hour I don't leave my hotel room and I don't talk all day. Which is I try not to talk on the phone, I try not to just deplete too much of my energy so that I'm super excited to get on the stage and talk.

Tim: Interesting.

Whitney: So that I almost am like – what would the metaphor be? The boiling pot? No. A balloon?

Tim: I'm not sure what you're going for. It could be either of those. It depends on what comes afterwards.

Whitney: I just mean when you're like chomping at the bit. I kind of deprive myself. It's almost like starving yourself before a meal.

You know, like I kind of like sit in my hotel room all day. I just do work. I don't talk on the phone so that I'm super amped to talk. So I would say don't go out to dinner first, don't go to lunch; hang out, watch TV.

Tim: Be starving for attention.

Whitney: Yes, exactly. Deprive yourself so by the time you get on stage, you're super connected.

Tim: That's the only human connection you have all day.

Whitney: Yes, craving intimacy instead of shut down and you've already filled your quota for connection all day.

Tim: When do you know that your material is ready for a three minute set? In other words, someone who hasn't even done the what's funny about a garbage can. Like we're talking, it's like: alright, Ferriss, you're on in an hour. What the fuck do I talk about?

Whitney: Here's the thing. You're already naturally funny, and you're smart so you're gonna be fine because pending any anxiety attacks or –

Tim: That's a big asterisk. I think I'm only funny when I'm not trying to be funny.

Whitney: But here's the thing. I feel like you are a public speaker naturally. You're very good at this. In front of a crowd, you're not going to have a problem and you're going to react to the situation, and be honest, and self deprecated and whatever. But I think the only time you really get in trouble is when you attach yourself to a script and aren't flexible. So if you go off on a thing of oh, you know who I am. If someone heckles you: I've read your book.

And then you're like, "So I was at the supermarket today..." if you can't respond in a conversational, present way, it's like boxing. If someone throw something new, you've got to change your combination or whatever it is. You have to be relentlessly present and flexible and detached from your plan. So it's make a plan, and then be ready to completely...

Tim: Adapt if needed.

Whitney: Adapt if needed.

Tim: And with your, say, two hours a night, let's say now you're getting ready, you do that. Well, I guess two very related questions. You have the two hours of night in preparation for recording the big special, is that right?

Whitney: Yes.

Tim: Then you have the night of recording the big special. What do your pregame rituals look like?

Whitney: Love it.

Tim: Like in the two hours before each of those, what happens?

Whitney: In the two hours, okay, I am right now touring to get ready for my HBO special, which I'm shooting in August. So every other weekend, I'm on the road in clubs. I like to perform in small spaces to really ascertain if things are working. I'm seeing people's faces. In a theater, you can get an applause rank. But when you're up close and see someone, you can't fake laughter, you can't fake [inaudible]—

[Crosstalk]

Tim: I would imagine if you have 30 people – if you have 200 people, ten people clap really loudly, you think you're killing it. Whereas if you have 30 people and one person claps, you're like: oh, shit.

Whitney: Exactly. But if you get a theater, you get this sort of false sense of bravado and false sense of success.

Whereas when you're in a club, people are drinking, and they're eating. You know, it's like you're up against more. So I like to practice in clubs. And so when the day actually comes, I have two dogs and I will send them with the dog people so they're not in the

house for those two days because they'll wake me up early, or whatever. Even though they provide me with a lot of emotional support, just avoiding any curb balls. And I'll wake up, ill do my normal routine. I'll listen to the set a couple of times, even though I know it inside and out, because I know I'm neurotic.

Tim: So this is a previous performance?

Whitney: The hour that I'm planning on doing, essentially, like the script. It's like going over a script. I have it recorded, and I'll go for a run, probably, with it in my ear.

Tim: And the recording is you reading the script?

Whitney: The recording is an actual performance. So I'll record all of my hours when I'm in the clubs on a voice memo on my iPhone.

Then I'll label them, this was good at this point, I did this new chunk of this, I'll be really specific about which one is which. The one that I feel should be the one that's recorded, I will go for a run and listen to it on my iPod, pad, phone, Samsung, sidekick, Atari.

Tim: Just have five phones strapped to your head.

Whitney: Pager, sky pager. And then I'll kind of lie in bed. I'll take a nap. I'll eat. And that's pretty much it. And then I have to get there at 4 for hair and makeup, and I'll meditate twice; 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes before the show.

Tim: Like transcendental meditation?

Whitney: Transcendental, yeah, TM.

Tim: So you've got your mantra?

Whitney: I've got my mantra. Don't tell anyone.

Tim: Puppy chow, puppy chow. Oh, my God, I can't believe I said that outside. Oh, allowed. I'm good.

Whitney: It's obsequious, obsequious. And really very economical with my energy, the day of.

Tim: So you've got the, let's just say, the warm-ups acts? That's probably not a polite way to say it.

The openers. You've got the openers. You know you've got 15 minutes to go time. What do you do in those 15 minutes?

Whitney: That's a good question. I'm usually managing or practicing wardrobe malfunctions.

Tim: Practicing? Like Janet Jackson, like nipple exposure?

Whitney: Yeah. I'll walk through my most extreme movements with my wardrobe to make sure, you know what I mean? Catastrophe trouble shooting, potentially. I'll just close my eyes and meditate.

Tim: Troubleshooting otherwise known as catastrophe sniping?

Whitney: Yeah, catastrophe sniping. I like that. And then sometimes something super normal because I'm a strong believer in this – everybody is; I'm not special because I believe in proven science but it's very Pavlovian. So all of a sudden if I'm doing something I've never done before, before a show then it's going to feel weird. So before I go onstage at the Comedy Store, tonight or any given night, I'm looking at Instagram, I'm on Twitter, I'm texting.

So I'll do something that I always do before I go on stage. Because if you put too much pressure on it, like this is a different show; I'm doing the same thing I've been doing the last four months. My work isn't done tonight; my work was done three months ago, and I just have to show up.

Tim: Right. I had a conversation with Paul Levesque, otherwise known as Triple H, the professional wrestler . He was on this podcast and he was telling me a story. He had just fought Floyd Mayweather, the junior. He was telling me a story about how he visited Floyd in his dressing room right before a huge fight. And he was just sitting there watching TV, and he's like, "Yeah, sit down, let's have a conversation." And Paul's like, "I don't want to bother you. I don't want you to get knocked out of the zone. Aren't you nervous?" And he's like, "What good is being nervous going to do me? If I'm not ready now, I'm not ready."

Whitney: 100 percent. So it's like if I need to do some weird ritual right now, then I've got bigger problems.

So I think for me, just keeping it very simple. If I'm shooting a special, my mom and dad – they have to come different nights – will come so I'll take a picture or something that just feels benevolent and connected. I'm very dorky about gratitude and I'll

just be thankful, and I'll thank the crew, and I'll talk to my director and just say thank you; just really do whatever I have to do to go out there and have a good time. I'm not taking myself seriously, I'm not stressed, I'm not in a zone.

It's like I know this backwards and forwards at this point so the only work I have to do is just be relentlessly present. And this sound so geeky, but I truly have to have a good time, because my work is already done. The misery of standup and the joy of standup is that when you're actually shooting it on TV, you're just showing off at that point. You're not in the trenches. Everything works. Anything I do on show night, I've done a hundred times and I know it works.

Tim: That's part of the reason I love watching – and I've seen Bryan do this – but work on material when it's not 100 percent. I find that fascinating.

Whitney: It's pretty cool. If you're a comedy nerd in any way, Kevin Nealon does a show at the Laugh Factory on Tuesday nights, and it's new material night.

Tim: This is in Los Angeles?

Whitney: In Los Angeles, yes. But I think they put videos on the Laugh Factory website or something, and it's comedians, big comedians who are only allowed to do new material. We'll call each other out. Dude, I know you've been doing that joke. Because we really try to be vulnerable and do fresh premises, and some of us are bombing and we're really struggling, and it's like being a beginner open-miker again.

Tim: Have you seen the documentary, *The Comedian*?

Whitney: Yeah, with Jerry Seinfeld and Orny?

Tim: Yes. How do you feel about that?

Whitney: I love it. I love it. I love Jerry. I think his work ethic is really – he just kind of nailed it. You know about this more than anyone, obviously but his whole thing is just do the work. There are no shortcuts.

There's a linear relationship in standup of how much you do it and how good you are. It's super simple, very merit driven. So I like his methodical approach. I've learned a lot from him and been

inspired from him. I think it's good to glamorize health because I think in standup especially, drug addiction and alcoholism is so glamorized. And Jerry does yoga and drinks smoothies, and he doesn't drink on stage. He takes it very seriously.

Standup is a job, and I think a lot of people see it more as a hobby because we all really just secretly want to be rock stars but aren't cool enough. But I think there was this generation of comedians, obviously, in the '70s and '80s who were all on coke and hookers. And now I think the pendulum has kind of swung. Everyone's in therapy and drinks dramba juice and is vegan.

I think Jerry in that documentary admitting how seriously he takes it, like the nerd in the class who gets a straight A and all the jocks hate, the guy's a loser; it's high school all over again. It's like he makes trying look cool. And then Orny is tricky because he just was so angry in that documentary. I worry a little bit that people were like oh, that's how all comedians are. but it's a documentary and if someone thinks that, that's their generalization.

Tim: Yeah, more their issue than the documentary's issue.

Whitney: Yeah. Orny is very, very funny, and I think that documentary was a big injury to his career. I think he would have been really big if it wasn't for that.

Tim: That was a fascinating documentary, for those who haven't seen it. But it's basically tracking a younger, up and coming comedian with Jerry working on new material. A friend's ex-girlfriend actually popped up. I was watching it with him, and he's like: wait, what?

She popped up. It was just her leading Jerry to the stage. And he's like, wait a second, is that my girlfriend?

Whitney: Random.

Tim: Bizarre, really bizarre.

Whitney: Chilling out twist.

Tim: I don't want to chew up your entire afternoon. This is really fun so maybe we'll do a round two sometime, but I'd love to ask you. Number one, equine therapy.

Whitney: Yes. Equine therapy is...

Tim: Is that when the horse rides you? How does this work.

Whitney: No, that's Ashley Madison. We've been through this.

Tim: Katharine the Great. That actually did not come out the way I intended it to. Sorry about that. That's my attempt at blue comedy.

Whitney: And I think you nailed it. It was a successful attempt. So I don't think you have to wait eight weeks. I think you should go on tonight. You can be my warm-up, as you would say.

Tim: What makes me angry? Horses riding women. Let's talk about it.

Whitney: I think this might interest you, and I hope that I do justice to it and explain it in an educated enough way to where it doesn't sound ridiculous. But horses are prey animals. So they are incredibly attune to any kind of threats. I mean, they're constantly scanning for threats which the human body does, also and we try to pretend it's not constantly. But essentially a horse can look at a bobcat and tell if it's hungry or not. It's fight or flight 101. They can literally read faces.

So when you are around a horse, a horse is codependent, if you will, looking at you and their behavior depends on your behavior. So essentially what you do in equine therapy, my goal was to practice being more direct and clear with my intention versus what I'm asking someone. Because a lot of times – and you can't see this if you're listening to this podcast, but I'll say: no, I'm fine; I'm not mad. I'm obviously mad.

I'm betraying my own face, and humans tend to be manipulative and passive aggressive and say one thing and mean another thing. I think that's something that maybe people in my field maybe do more than you and what you do. You seem very clear.

Tim: Good actor.

Whitney: Affective, great actor, pathological liar, sociopath, American Psycho, American History X. I found that I was really struggling with saying one thing and meaning another thing, and being apologetic and not being present and not getting the results out of people that I wanted.

There was a great documentary called *Buck*. It's about the guy that was a horse whisperer. Essentially the whole premise of the

documentary is that in order to control something, you have to give it more control. So in order to get power over someone, you have to empower them. So people bring these problem horses and they're pulling them, and trying to control them.

And the first thing he does is give them more reins and give them the opportunity to make the right decision. So you can control something when you give them more control. So that really fascinated me, that documentary, in the way that he was able to nonverbally communicate with horses because we waste so much time trying to verbally communicate with people, and a lot of times we just confuse them.

And words are so subjective and we talk way too much so people don't actually understand what we're saying. I don't know if this has ever happened to you but a lot of times, when I'm writing a script or a TV show, I'll get notes from an executive or the editors.. I'll be in a meeting for an hour and I'll walk out, and I'm like, I have no idea.

Tim: I have no idea what we attempted to have communicated.

Whitney: We spoke for an hour and I have no clue what my objective is. I don't know what the notes are, I don't know if they liked it. Like we just bloviate to the point of talking in circles. I went in with the horses; a girlfriend of mine took me for my birthday.

The first thing you do is you pick a horse. There are four horses, all with various degrees of damage and backgrounds. She tells you about each one and you choose your horse, which already says everything that she needs to know about you, based on the one that you choose. It's like a Rorschach test or something. So that's really interesting. Then the first objective is get the horses from one end of the corral to the other, which is probably like half a football field. It's big, and you're like how am I going to – hello?

Tim: That's the Bat phone.

Whitney: That's the Bat phone; Ashley Madison in customer service. So I'm like, how do you get horses with no rein from one end to the other? This is crazy, without controlling them or hitting them. You can't use treats. I can't use charm, I can't use humor, I can't use intelligence; I can't use any of the things I rely on on a daily basis to manipulate and beguile people. And so essentially, you have to use your intention.

So you let them know we're going to the other end. You can use words if you want. As long as you're saying something and meaning it, they're going to buy it. You can't see me doing this but if you're going, "I need you to come with me, is that okay?"

Tim: It's too unclear.

Whitney: No. They're unclear, they don't trust you. You're not in charge; you don't have status. So I go and I'm leading them from one end to the other. They're following me, and it's like magic. They're following me and then halfway through, I say to my friend: oh, my God, they're following me. And they stopped. I was like, what just happened?

She's like, you lost your connection to them because you focused on something else. It was like magic, almost. It was amazing. It's a way to practice being present and connected and having a consistent intention with essentially these animals that are basically a mirror to your psyche.

Tim: That's very cool.

Whitney: It's super cool. When you stop focusing, they stop focusing. And whenever you lie, they freeze. Because they don't understand lie. They just see she means something but she's say something else, and they free.

So as soon as you're disingenuous, or pretend you're not scared and you are, they just freeze and look at you.

Tim: They don't get it.

Whitney: They're just like, grow up. And you're like: oh, sorry, let me be clearer. It's this really cool way that I think – and I'm not saying I'm one of these people but I think smart people who have so much therapy and we're so over therapized, sometimes it's just keep it simple, bread and butter, another animal in a cage, yes or no. It's so primal and simple.

Tim: I love it.

Whitney: I've almost learned so much from that than any other book or therapy I've ever done.

Tim: For those people interested in a lot of this stuff, I'm really tempted to experience that firsthand.

Whitney: It's here. The woman I go to is out in Topanga and it's awesome. It's called the Reflective Horse. A lot of rehab patients do equine therapy.

Tim: I was going to say Temple Grandin worked a lot with horses early on, and that's how she started to realize wow, I'm actually very good at understanding what they need, what they're afraid of, etc. So fascinating. You mentioned book, and then you said therapy. So I'll ask you a book question, which is what book or books have you gifted to other people the most?

Whitney: Oh, that's a great question. I like to pretend that I read fiction, and I just don't. So I went through this phase of giving people – because I read one fiction book in the last three years called *Super Sad True Love Story*, by Gary Shteyngart which is phenomenal.

Tim: Super Sad True Love Story? Is it super sad?

Whitney: It's super sad but very funny. Well, not super.

It's like a dystopian satire on the future. Essentially it's like we all have cell phones sort of embedded in our chests, and as soon as I see you, I can know everything about you; your cholesterol, your genetics, your dad had a stroke, your bank account, your credit report. Like essentially, we know everything about everyone instantaneously. It's very interesting and could happen.

I read that because I had to, because a friend of mine who's sort of successful and has everything, and had a birthday weekend and you can't get her anything so our gift to her was we all had to read the same book, which was so annoying. Don't be friends with rich celebrities.

Tim: Here's your homework assignment.

Whitney: I was so annoyed and then it ended up obviously being excellent, and Gary Shteyngart is phenomenal. So I started giving it to everyone more as an ego –

Tim: I read fiction.

Whitney: I read fiction, guys. I'm so erudite, I'm so cultured and as a pat on the back. But I don't want to mislead you into thinking I actually read fiction; I'm not that normal.

[02:06:03]

I give *The Drama of the Gifted Child* a lot to people.

Tim:

This book has come up just in the last week with a number of friends of mine who are very talented, high performers. *The Drama of the Gifted Child*.

Whitney:

Yes. It's one of the basics. *The Drama of the Gifted Child*. If you're a creative person, if you have any kind of anxiety or discomfort, just read it. It's hard to sum up. Another one I give a lot is *The Fantasy Bond*, which is incredibly dense and clinical but it's about essentially what happens between ages 1 and 3, sort of ordains your whole life. It's kind of about attachment, like our attachment strategies based on how much eye contact we got as a child, if we were breastfed, how much physical contact we got, the dynamics we walked into as a child and how we see the world according to those formative years, which is pretty fascinating stuff.

I think I have a lot of shame around the fact that I'm like almost an attention seeker, if that makes any sense. Like being a comedian, there's a little bit of shame for me when it's like, why do I have this much of a compulsion to be seen and heard? Like, what is this? And once I got a handle on the fact that as a kid, I wasn't seen and heard enough and I was trying to get these childhood needs met as an adult through my work.

Once I got a handle on that understanding, it made me need it less. I was like, oh, my God, I don't want to be famous; what am I doing? This is horrible. You can't undo this. So I feel like because I read this book, I took a year off of being on TV because I didn't need that anymore. I wasn't like: I just need to be seen as much as possible by as many people as possible. That's not a healthy compulsion.

It backfired in some ways. So I was able to kind of take control of myself.

Tim:

The Fantasy Bond.

Whitney:

The Fantasy Bond. It's Robert Firestone, maybe? Yeah, it was recommended by Mark Maron, actually, the epitome of mental health.

Tim:

Marc is, in large part, responsible for me wanting to experiment with podcasting [inaudible]—

[Crosstalk]

Whitney: Really? That's so cool.

Tim: I had such a great experience on his podcast, [inaudible] podcast, the Nerdist podcast.

Whitney: Yeah, my favorites.

Tim: This long form thing is really fun.

Whitney: Yeah, one of my faves. We were on tour together last summer and he was reading it. I was sort of, I think things come in your life exactly when you need them kind of thing, like this book, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, the universe wants you to read this book, I guess. But I was just in a receptive moment and he was reading it, and I was like boom, and it was just the perfect time.

Tim: Cool. I'll check it out.

Whitney: So I've been giving those.

Another good one, because a lot of my friends are having kids, is called *The Continuum Concept*. It's about attachment parenting.

Tim: Is this basically like you keep the kid with you 24/7 until they crawl away kind of thing?

Whitney: Kind of, yes. And the point is...

Tim: What's it called?

Whitney: *The Continuum Concept*. And oddly, it was recommend by my equine therapy teacher. It's about essentially there are all sorts of chemical reasons, like dopamine and oxytocin that are given off when we touch each other, especially people we love and bond with. But that if you always go to a child when they cry, they learn if I need something, my needs will get me; I can trust that someone else will meet my needs.

So attachment parenting is when your child cries, you go to them. You can't necessarily solve their problem but they know that their voice is being heard, and they feel heard. So they're more secure, more trusting of their environment; they don't deny their reality as adults, essentially, their expectations for the future.

Tim: If you don't mind my asking, why did your equine therapy instructor give you this –

Whitney: I thought you were going to say ex. I was like, uh-oh.

Tim: No. Why did...

Whitney: Equine therapy recommend that?

Tim: Yeah.

Whitney: We were talking about attachment, I think. We were talking about the horse, that I didn't have trust that the horse was going to follow me, like I kept checking in. Because equine therapy is so fascinating because of what comes up, the way that we relate to horses says so much about the how we try to run businesses, marriages, relationships. It's just a metaphor for everything because the way you do anything is the way you do everything.

So I kept checking in and doubting the reality that the horse was following me. I was incredulous that it was happening. And she's like: you really question reality. You always doubt yourself and you think that your perception is wrong and the Damocles sword is going to fall. You're always looking for the catastrophe.

So she was like, read this book. And I did to kind of get an understanding of something must have happened that made me constantly – and it's true; I'm always waiting for the other shoe to drop. When something's going well, I'm just like looking around and instead of enjoying the moment, I'm just waiting for the catastrophe. So it was sort of like that.

Tim: Blue comedy. No, blue – it's really confusing to me. And the expression, "waiting for the other shoe to drop."

Whitney: Interesting. Because you know what I always think of when I think of waiting for the other shoe to drop?

Tim: What?

Whitney: Is shoes on a phone line in a bad neighborhood. What do you think that means?

Tim: Wait a second. What do I think your envisioning that means?

Whitney: Wait. Okay. I always think of bad shoes in the neighborhood when I think of waiting for the other shoe to drop; that's the vision that comes to mind. Also, do you know what it means when shoes are hanging in a bad neighborhood?

Tim: I don't.

Whitney: But you've seen it, right?

Tim: I always thought it was just kids being dicks.

Whitney: Rorschach test.

Tim: But I think I'm probably totally wrong.

Whitney: You'll see a phone line and you'll see a pair of sneakers hanging in bad neighborhoods. Apparently, it's where someone died of heroin so you know that's where the best heroin is.

Tim: Oh, my lord.

Whitney: So when people see shoes hanging – thank you. I got it right?

Male Speaker: Ninja approved.

Whitney: I got it Ninja on it approved. Hashtag on it. And then you know that's where you should buy heroin because that's the purest stuff because it killed someone.

Tim: That's insane.

Whitney: Insane. Blue comedy.

Tim: Blue comedy, indeed. That was Travis Buer, i.e. brewer making a cameo. When you think of the word successful, who's the first person who comes to mind?

Whitney: Steve Jobs.

Tim: Steve Jobs.

Whitney: Is that weird? I like him anyway, though so that was on the tip of my...

Tim: Brain.

Whitney: Brain. However...

Tim: If you had to choose a second person?

Whitney: It has to be at the tip of my brain, doesn't it? I'm over thinking it. I was just going to say something that is just going to open up a weird can of words, because I was going to say Sheryl Sandberg because I feel like she had this well rounded life, and a personal life, also, which recently imploded, which is not funny. I think I used to define success as someone at the top of their field professionally only, and now I also view it as someone who has balance, like a good relationship with friends and family, time, has fun.

When they're not working, they're actually not working so that's why I was thinking about her. Drew Barrymore, this is really weird but I follow her on Instagram. She really seems to go to the beach a lot. She has two kids. She seems to have kind of nailed it. I was just like God, that must be nice.

Steve Jobs and Drew Barrymore and Sheryl Sandberg? That's a trifecta of success.

Tim: That's a motley crew.

Whitney: Elon Musk is a good one.

Tim: Yeah, smart guy.

Whitney: I don't really know about his personal life but in terms of making an impact, I think he's probably done a pretty good job. You're very successful.

Tim: Yes, he's very good at betting the farm and pulling it off. I think he made \$180 million from the sale of PayPal and he took all of it and put it into three companies and had to borrow money for rent, I think.

Whitney: Yeah, he's like Bill Burr. He keeps making himself poor so he has to get rich again.

Tim: Yeah, that's actually an interesting comparison.

Whitney: It's interesting because all these comedians came to mind. I was thinking of Richard Pryor and Louis C.K. and Jerry Seinfeld. All

these comedians were coming to mind. But I think for me, because I've seen what the success has cost them...

Tim: You know how the sausage is made.

Whitney: Yes. So I don't know Elon or Steve Jobs, what it cost them emotionally, family-wise. So I'm a little bit naïve about it.

Tim: In Jobs' case, a lot.

Whitney: A lot, I'm sure. And it was interesting because I think the reason I latched onto him, it's obviously a pretty hacky, unoriginal inspiring figure. But I think when I was the boss for the first time, I think for some reason I looked up to him in a way because everyone was like: he's an asshole, he's crazy. And I was like, maybe everyone who's the boss is crazy because no one likes their boss because they're telling them to go do work. I remember people saying he was such a dick. If something wasn't perfect, he'd make them fix it. And I'd be like: what's so wrong with that?

Tim: Isn't that what you're supposed to do?

Whitney: I mean, that sounds like a great boss. He sounds like a great leader. And I hear all these horror stories and I think I started getting paranoid that people thought I was difficult. And I'm like: why is it difficult to say I think we can do better? I think we can beat this joke.

I want this to be good; all of our names are on it. You're being paid a tremendous amount of money to be here. Why am I such a jerk? And I think that through the lens of people's egos and feelings and stuff, it just ends up being: he's crazy; he's an asshole. I have yet to meet or know of one successful person who everyone doesn't think is crazy. It's pretty much just [inaudible]—

[Crosstalk]

Tim: I think that's par for the course, generally speaking.

Whitney: He's crazy, he's a fucking nut, he's psycho. It's like, okay.

Tim: Or you just catch someone on an off day. I've met some people who are celebrities who in person, every time I've seen them in their interaction with people with me, they've been great. But I'd read things about them online at some point where someone's like: oh, my God, I was touring with this guy, and he wouldn't sign

fans' autographs; he was a dick. And I'm like, maybe he just had a bad day. Like had he broke up with his girlfriend, or who the hell knows?

Whitney: The other week I was in the airport and people were asking for pictures. My dad had just had a stroke, and I was like: I'm sorry, I can't.

And I'm sure that those people are going: she's such an asshole. I'm sure they were. But we just can't concern – what you think of me is none of my business, etc. Louis C.K., I don't know if you know this; it interests me; he doesn't take photos with people.

Tim: Really?

Whitney: But he says, "I won't take a photo with you but I will talk to you for five minutes." And he says almost everybody declines.

Tim: Oh, I bet.

Whitney: They just want the photo.

Tim: Why doesn't he do the photos?

Whitney: I don't know. I don't remember.

Tim: Maybe it's like if you're going to occupy this time, I want you to have to do some work, as well.

Whitney: Maybe. Like what am I going to get out of this?

Tim: No, not even that. If we're going to have an exchange, let's have an exchange.

Whitney: Yeah, if you want to connect, let's really connect. I'm sure he has a really interesting reason why he doesn't. I always say getting your picture taken is just so weird, especially on a press line, like when actresses have to go down a press line and just pose.

I've stopped doing it because I'm like unless someone gives me a healthy inter monologue to recite while I'm doing that, I'm not going to do it. Because you're just like: look at me, am I sexy, am I thin enough? Like it's just such unhealthy things that you're thinking.

Tim: It's like what's in my head every time I ride the subway.

Whitney: I love that you ride the subway. So it's like I'm sure when he's posing with something, it's just like...

Tim: It's BART in San Francisco. It's kind of like the Mad Max marauder version of the subway.

Whitney: I like that.

Tim: It's carpeted.

Whitney: It's not the outdoor one, is it?

Tim: Why would you ever carpet a place as filthy as a subway car? I don't know.

Whitney: It's not the trolley.

Tim: No, it's not the Rice-A-Roni thing.

Whitney: It's underground?

Tim: Yeah, exactly.

Whitney: You get Elon Musk on that.

Tim: The hyper loop.

Whitney: The hyper carpet. Hyper carpet loop.

Tim: The hyper carpet.

Whitney: So yeah, I think he just feels like – you feel kind of violated, someone just ambushing you. He's with his kids...

Tim: When you have a family, I can only imagine it really must change.

Whitney: And when one person gets one, then all of a sudden everybody wants one.

So I think he just, for whatever reason, I'm sure he has a dignified reason for it. To talk to Louis C.K. for five minutes could be the best five minutes of your life and people are like: no thanks. I just wanted to Instagram it and show off that I met you. This is about me. It's not about you.

Tim: Yeah that's wild.

Whitney: It's like the culture of narcissism. I remember I was at the People's Choice Awards, which is like a really silly awards show. They have seat fillers.

Tim: Wait, seat filler?

Whitney: Seat fillers, there are all the celebrities there but then everyone else in the audience are paid seat fillers who are super attractive.

Tim: It's like an Indonesian political rally. They pay people with signs to come. Oh, they absolutely do.

Whitney: That's so funny. I didn't know that. I love it that yours and my reference points are so different. Yours are so much more impressive. So they get paid \$50 to dress pretty and look good because they're going to be on camera maybe in a panning shot or something.

So I'm sitting and Ellen was in front of me, but Ellen had gone on stage. But there are all these seat fillers, beautiful. The seat fillers are more attractive than the celebrities. So on stage is, I want to say, Ellen and Chris Pine, who is a famous actor. I see these people holding up their cameras. And I'm trying to look over them and I see that they're taking selfies of themselves. And I'm like: no, the celebrities are that way. You're not the celebrity. There's a celebrity two feet in front of them and they're taking a picture of themselves. It was crazy. Flip it around

Tim: It's a bizarre world we live in. Just a few least questions. If you could put a billboard anywhere and have anything you want on the billboard, text, photo; what would it be, where would it be?

Whitney: Like a message I would want to get out?

Tim: It could be a message or it could be a photo.

Whitney: Of anything?

Tim: Anything.

Whitney: Wow, this is a really good question. You should have a podcast. Everyone's got their things, their causes. My cause is dogs. Everyone's got their thing, and I'm sure when something else touches me, that will be my thing; when cancer touches my family

or whatever. Alcoholism has touched my family but I haven't been compelled to get super in the trenches of that. But a statistic that really affected me, two statistics that I just sort of wish people knew was that 3 million dogs die a year in shelters, and 17 million a year get bought. So it's just like...

Tim: Right, the three shouldn't exist.

Whitney: Crazy math. Yeah. It should be – don't make me do this math – 14 a year are bought. That should just be the statistic. So that was something that just hearing that, I was like God, that is such a waste. That is just so much death and it's so karmically bad for this species. I was always kind of trying to do dog rescue and I didn't really know how, and once I got that statistic I felt kind of emboldened to be like, alright, I know exactly where my energy can go. It was very empowering to learn that.

And another thing is I work with this charity called the Beagle Freedom Project. It's beagles that are tested on in labs that the tests are usually inane and don't do much. It's just so you can say a product is tested on an animal and that it's safe. This statistic kind of blew my mind, which is that beagles are chosen to be the dogs tested on in labs because they're the most forgiving of all dog breeds. So you can hurt them a bunch of times and they'll still give you the benefit of the doubt and they'll still keep forgiving you.

Tim: That's like the most heart wrenching thing I've ever heard.

Whitney: Heartbreaking. So once I heard that, I was like: I'm in; you're preying on the weakest, sweetest so I got involved in that. I think that if you don't have kids, and if you're busy like you and I are and you travel a lot, dogs are just an easy, rewarding, sort of healthy thing. So I feel like I would just put those on billboards, maybe.

Tim: So what would it say?

Whitney: In China at the dog meat festival. That's probably the location I would pick. The Yulin Dog Meat Festival. It makes me crazy.

Tim: Is there a dog meat festival? Are you serious?

Whitney: Oh, my God, the Yulin Dog Meat Festival. This obviously means you don't follow me on Instagram, which is StopYulin2015 is my big obsession right now. But yeah, there's a dog meat festival that's going on I think right now in China. Where they actually

kidnap people's domesticated dogs. So you just wake up and your dogs are gone, and then there's a dog meat festival.

Tim: Wow.

Whitney: I mean, here's the thing. With China, they don't treat their people that great, either, much less their dogs or their children.

So that's a bigger issue that I'm not really qualified to talk about.

Tim: Wow, dog meat festival.

Whitney: Dog meat festival. Whenever I tell people, I think a lot of people want to help dogs, or animals or cats or anything, it's too big of an issue.

Tim: It's too broad.

Whitney: As soon as they hear that beagles are the most – people are like, how do I help? And a lot of people don't even know they're getting tested on.

Tim: Okay, got it. So it could be beagles are the most tested on dog species; they're also the most forgiving. And then tagline, whatever that is.

Whitney: Yes. WhitneyCummings.com. Buy tickets.

Tim: There we go.

Whitney: Download my stuff.

Tim: Download my stuff.

Whitney: No, I'm using it.

Tim: I'm not actually donating anything.

Whitney: No, donate just to me. I just got this to get your attention.

Tim: I just wanted to bring this to your attention.

Whitney: I just wanted to capture your heart so that I could then manipulate you into buying me a vacation home. Gotcha.

Tim: Gotcha. That was a nice political move.

Whitney: [Inaudible].

Tim: It's great. It's like I'm glad you asked that question; let me answer it a different way, meaning WhitneyCummings.com

Whitney: I also think donating to animals is just my drug of choice, I guess. I don't drink. I mean I drink but not to excess. And I don't do drugs. When I give money to animals, I feel as good so I just feel like a lot of people, once they start – you feel good if you give \$20 to whatever, you know? I think everyone wins.

Tim: What advice would you give to your 25-year-old self?

Whitney: 25. There's so much advice. I would say don't wear any of what you're wearing right now.

Tim: Which was what?

Whitney: You know, it's funny. I dressed like a boy from the '70s until I was like 209. Vintage New Balance sneakers, bell bottoms and a hoodie with a backpack. That was my uniform, which was kind of like my shield of please don't see me as a sexual being when I did standup.

I tried to really neutralize my gender. Stop drinking Diet Coke, stop drinking aspartame. I feel like I just missed the new thing. My early 20s in college was all artificial sweeteners and carp. That's why I'm drinking this stupid beet juice. And I think it really compromised my productivity. Who knows what that was doing to my brain chemistry. And I think maybe the main thing is those mistakes are actually getting you to exactly where you want to go. They're rerouting you to your dreams. I hate the word failure because I always think it's like a step in the right direction. So all the things I agonized over, the jobs I didn't get.

I was in bed crying my eyes out for a week because I didn't get a job as a VH1 host of a countdown; something that would just be so embarrassing. If you saw my Wikipedia page today, it'd be like can we really not talk about that? It would have been a thing that I said please don't talk about it on that podcast. It would have been so embarrassing now. But at the time, it was like...

Tim: The Holy Grail.

Whitney: I was destroyed over it. And I didn't realize oh, my God, in a couple years...

Tim: Dodged a bullet.

Whitney: I dodged a bullet. I would have saved a lot of time and energy and anguish.

Tim: So your mistakes are taking you where you want to go.

Whitney: Yes, exactly.

Tim: I like it. This has been great. Where can people learn more about you?

Whitney: Ashley Madison dot com. Whitehouse dot porn. I literally got this call the other day. My lawyer was like: hey, we need to buy your dot porn. And I was like, are we changing the game plan? Is there something I don't know? Are the ratings down?

Tim: Yeah, you're like I'm not sure what you've opted me into.

Whitney: The dot porn is about to come out so you have to buy your domain. You're welcome.

Tim: Thank you. I'll get on that.

Whitney: You got yours. Tim Ferriss dot porn. Reroute it to your blog.

Tim: I'll send it to your website.

Whitney: There you go.

Tim: So the home base is... where should people go?

Whitney: My tour dates and stuff are all WhitneyCummings.com. And then I have Twitter, WhitneyCummings. My Instagram is WhitneyACummings because Whitney Cummings is a 15-year-old black, aspiring singer who is pretty talented, actually, and has a lot of followers, thanks to me.

Tim: Nice.

Whitney: As opposed to two photos. But yeah, Whitney A. Cummings.

Tim: Got it. Any last ask of the audience? If you could ask the audience to do one thing, what would it be? Besides visit the website.

Whitney: This is so provocative. I'm using parts of my brain I never use. If I could ask the audience to do one thing, what would it be? God, that's a really deep question; I have so many thoughts. Do you. Do your thing. Live out loud. Be authentic. I don't know. Do you ask that question? I haven't heard you ask that.

Tim: I don't ask it too often.

Whitney: If you could ask the audience to do one thing. Watch comedy; it's good for you.

Tim: Okay. Now, I'll dig on that for a second. If somebody who's seen comedy occasionally but is not a connoisseur wants to enjoy comedy more, get more out of it, if they're watching, say, a standup special, what should they pay attention to or think of to see kind of an extra layer, or ask themselves? Anything?

Whitney: I think look at what offends you. If something offends you, watch Richard Pryor, watch Daniel Tosh. Watch the most incendiary comedians. Bill Burr, maybe Louis C.K.'s monologue that he just did on SNL and there was this outcry because he talked about pedophiles or something. If something offends you, look inward. That's a sign that there's something there.

Tim: I love it.

Whitney: What offends someone says a lot about them.

Tim: Agreed. I think it was Mae West who said, "Those who are shocked easily should be shocked more often."

Whitney: I like that. I love her. I have a huge poster of Mae West in my office. But who a lot of people think was a man, and a lot of people think was a man. The original Rachel Dolezal, is that her name? the girl who pretended to be black, the NAACP woman?

Tim: I don't know.

Whitney: Yeah. I was on a plane yesterday. I was way too deep into the news.

Yeah, I would say look at what offends you and it will probably help you with some self awareness.

Tim: That's great. I love it. Thank you so much for the time. This was great.

Whitney: Thanks, thanks.

Tim: Alright, to be continued. And until next time, thanks for listening, folks. For all the links, resources and so on from this episode, just go to fourhourworkweek.com/podcast. Toodle-oo.