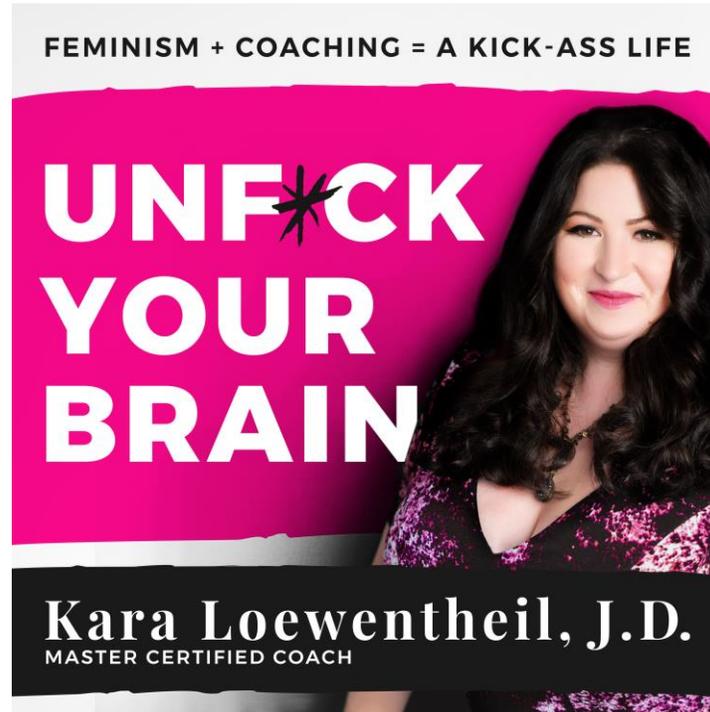


UFYB 23: Want Vs. Need



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unfuck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And how here's your host, Harvard law school grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello, my chickens – how are your roosts today? That's where chickens sleep, I think. It is officially spring, and yet it snowed here, in New York today, which I think is really unacceptable and we should have a word with someone about that.

So anyway, in spring, as we all know, a young man's fancies turn to love – that's how the saying goes – and a woman's fancies turn to obsessive anxiety about text messages and what they mean. So today, I want to teach you one of my favorite tools for revolutionizing your love life. And let me be clear, this is true whether you're on a first date or you've been married for 20 years.

It's not really about text messages and it actually works for non-dating relationships too, but I see this thought error in dating so much more so that's why I'm going to really focus on it. So I call this want versus need. The current, kind of, self-help-y empowerment literature is just chock full to the brim of the idea that people should meet each other's needs. How often have you heard this?

We are taught through this kind of literature and this social construct right now, which is very much of just a certain historical cultural moment – this is not how everybody has always thought. So we are taught these days that as children, we have needs that our parents are supposed to meet; emotional and material. If they don't meet them correctly, we are traumatized forever and need a lot of therapy. Then we grow up and we are supposed to substitute other people for our parents.

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It kind of sounds insane when you say it that way, but that's the theory. Like, our friends or romantic partners, those people are supposed to take over from our parents and meet our needs. So in this way of thinking, telling other people what your needs are and how they should meet them is supposed to be empowering.

So I think this is insane, y'all; I really do. What this framework does is tell you that the way for you to feel good is to tell everyone what you want them to do and then give them the power to determine your emotional state based on how much they comply with your instructions. Except, instead of just saying want because that would sound too demanding, we call it a need and that elevates it to this, kind of, quasi-moral obligation.

And for people who really buy into this, entire relationships just become a long exercise of informing the other person about your needs, quote en quote, and then trying to get them to produce the actions you want so that you can consider your needs as having been met. This sounds like a lot of sexy fun, doesn't it? Just the kind of vibe I want to have.

Here's the problem – how does it feel when you tell yourself that you need someone else to act in a certain way? Does it feel amazing and empowering? Not so much. You may feel briefly empowered if they do what you want. Then you probably feel great and the reason you feel great is you make that mean a lot of things about them and you. You have a whole bunch of thoughts in your brain.

When they do what you want, you think, they love me, they care about me, I'm worthwhile, I'm valuable, I'm getting what I want and then you feel great because of those thoughts, not because of what they did. Don't make any mistake here; telling other people how to meet your needs works just like trying to manage and control other people's behavior when we call it just doing that.

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It works great when other people comply, like why not. It works terribly when they don't and often, they will not because other people don't exist just to do what we want. So when you put your emotional state on other people doing what you want, it's going to work great when it works, but there's a big downside which is that like 80% of the time, it doesn't work and then it feels terrible because when somebody doesn't do what you tell them they need to do, you feel completely disempowered.

Telling yourself that you need someone else to act a certain way so you can think and feel a certain way is a sure-fire recipe for trying to manipulate someone else in order to control your own thoughts and feelings. This is what feeling, quote en quote, needy is. When you say you feel needy, it's because you're telling yourself that someone else has to act a certain way for you to feel okay and then you're feeling disempowered and desperate for them to do it.

Let's be real, even in the cases where they do it, it actually doesn't help most of the time. It helps for like a minute, but then you start thinking, well it doesn't count because I asked them to. And then you still don't really feel any better, you just account it to yourself.

Asking other people to meet your needs doesn't work because other people's behavior doesn't cause your thoughts or feeling. When you are feeling anxious or unhappy about someone else's behavior, the problem is your own thoughts.

So the solution is not to figure out exactly what you want them to do differently and explain it to them and try to emotionally browbeat them into doing it, okay. The first part of that is kind of on the right track. It is useful to try to figure out what you want them to do differently, but not so you can inform them and make them do it.

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It's useful to figure it out because that's how you'll get insight into what you predict you would think and feel if they did what you wanted. So whenever you're like, "Well I have this need that you listen closely to what I'm telling you about my day and ask questions so I can feel loved." That's not a need.

What's happening is you're thinking, "He doesn't ask questions about my day because he doesn't care. I need him to ask questions about my day so that I can think the thought, he cares." So it is useful to ask yourself what I want him to do and why, but not so that you can explain it to him and make him do it, because as I just said, then you'll end up discounting it anyway because you had to ask for it.

It's useful to ask that so you can see, "Oh, that's what my brain is doing. My brain is telling me that this person doesn't ask about my day because they don't love me. And what do I want? I want him to ask about my day so I can think he's interested and he loves me. Okay, that's my goal. I want to think he loves me, he's interested in me. Can I think that now? What other evidence could I look for that already exists for that proposition?"

That's what asking that question helps you figure out, right; what are the thoughts and feelings that you want? And you know what's a lot more direct than trying to manage other people into meeting your needs so you can think and feel what you want – just deciding to think and feel what you want instead, regardless of what they do.

Because here's the thing, we're told that making other people meet our needs is how we build intimacy. We tell them how we want them to behave and then if they behave that way, we can feel close to them. This is fucking bonkers, you guys.

When you do that, you're not creating intimacy. You are not creating closeness. You are not relating to the person as who they are. The point of

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intimacy is supposed to be a connection with another person. When you tell people what they need to do to meet your needs so you can feel okay, you're just using them as an emotional vending machine. It has nothing to do with them and who they are as a person and you really appreciating that.

You're like, "Well I've ordered A5, please deliver my validation. I've punched in A9, now you have to ask about my day so I can believe you love me." It's like the opposite of relating authentically to someone and appreciating them for who they are, which is what you want the person to do for you.

You're like, "Your job is to appreciate me authentically for who I am and then also to provide all my feelings." If you want to truly experience intimacy and the joy of connection, meet your own damn needs. Create your own validation. When you do that, you can just enjoy other people for who they are.

Your partner's only job is to be there for you to love them; that's it. I'm going to say that again; your partner's only job – and it's not just partner, your kid's only job, your parent's only job, your friend's only job, your boss's only job – is to be there for you to love them. That's it.

It is not to create your feelings. It is not to meet your needs. What you want is to feel connection and love. If you don't feel connection and love, it's not because someone else isn't meeting your needs. It's because you aren't meeting your own damn needs. You aren't managing your mind. You aren't creating that loving relationship with yourself.

When you truly and fully love yourself, that's when you can fully and truly love other people for themselves instead of using them as validation vending machines. So if you want to never feel needy again, stop spending all your mental energy thinking about how other people should act so you

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can think and feel the way you want. Figure out how to work on thinking the way you want now, regardless of how other people act.

You do that, any relationship you're in becomes 1000 times happier without the other person changing at all. Now, here's the most common objection I get when I teach this – but then people can just treat me however they want and I'm being a doormat. That's what my students always say. And I'm not making fun of them or you guys. It makes sense, the way we've been taught to think, that that's what would come up.

Here's what I have to say to that. Number one – people can already treat you however they want and they do because they have free will the same as you. You resisting it doesn't change it. The question isn't can they treat you however they want – because they can. The question is why are you sticking around hanging out with someone who doesn't offer the kind of relationship you want?

And here's the mind-blowing part – you think the needs thing is empowering. It's the opposite. The reason you're hanging out with someone who's not offering the kind of relationship you want is because you want them to meet your needs. When you call something a need, you make it sound very important and psychologically objective.

It elevates what you would prefer to have into some kind of erred desire that someone else is almost morally wrong for not complying with. And when you believe that someone else has to meet your needs, when you believe you can't feel the way you want without them acting a certain way, you're not willing to let them go because now you've got yourself into this cycle where you're desperate to push the buttons on the vending machine and get what you want out of it.

So that's what gets you into this push-pull where you want someone else to meet your needs and you believe that if they did then you could feel how

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you want. That's why you end up trying to chase down validation from people who obviously aren't that interested in you or just aren't interested in having the same kind of relationship that you are.

If you know that you can feel how you want no matter what, there's no reason to chase down that validation. You actually don't get sucked into this whole push-pull of meet my needs. If you meet your own needs, you get more discerning about your relationships, not less. You have it exactly backwards.

You think, "If I don't tell other people how they have to treat me then I'll just put up with anything." It's the exact opposite. You, quote en quote, put up with a lot of things that you don't enjoy or don't like or don't want to be around because you believe that the only way to feel okay is for that person to change their behavior and give you what you want.

If you knew that you could feel okay no matter what, there'd be no reason to stick it out with these people who aren't offering what you want. Once you meet your own needs, you only want to add other people to your life if you just genuinely enjoy them as humans to have around because when you stop calling your desires needs, you can just see them for what they are.

They're just things you want. Like, "I want someone who responds to my text messages. I want someone who listens when I talk about my day. I want someone who wants to snuggle and give me orgasms." Those just sound fun. I don't need those things to believe I'm lovable or that I'm worthwhile or that other people are, like acceptable.

It just is what I'd like to experience. It sounds fun. You see how calling it a want just takes all the drama out of it. It means, number one – I can decide how important are each of these things really compared to some other things that I might want or be experiencing. It also means I don't have to

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fight with someone about my needs and how they aren't meeting them and why they should and what it means about them or me if they don't. I don't get sucked into using this person to try to prove something to myself.

If you are providing and creating your own validation, you'll find you're much less interested in hanging around with people who aren't into the same kind of vibe you are or don't want to have the same kind of connection, whether that's friends or lovers or romantic partners or whatever that is. Because why bother, if you're meeting your needs, if you provide your own validation, if you are not constantly trying to manipulate other people into being different then you really have no point.

There's no point to hanging out with someone who isn't interested in having the same kind of connection you are. So you actually get more discerning, not less. Think of it this way; if you are starving, you will eat whatever you can find. It might be half-rotted and disgusting and covered in ants. It doesn't matter; if you're starving, you'll eat it.

If you're well-fed, you're only going to make room on your plate for something truly delicious and delectable, just for the joy of eating it. Your emotional hunger works the same way. If you feed yourself fully, if you meet your own needs, you will find the quality and enjoyment you have in your relationships gets so much better. It doesn't get worse. You don't, quote en quote, put up with more. You don't not have any standards, it's the opposite.

You become so much more discerning about where to spend your time and energy because you're not chasing that validation. You're not chasing that feeling of being okay because you can meet your own needs and then other people only get to hang around if they're super awesome and cool and fun and you really want to love them.

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Okay, my chickens, that is the crash course on how to never feel needy again. Remember, your needs are not needs. You have a need for food and shelter and water. And most humans do have some need for some kind of social interaction – like if you live in a cave by yourself for your whole life, for a lot of people, that's no good; it's pretty basic.

Everything else, that somebody ask about your day, that they talk to you in this way, that they touch you in that way, that they answer your text messages, that they want to hang out with your family, that they think a certain way – sometimes your needs are like, “You need to have this thought in your brain. That's one of my needs.” All that shit is just wants and those wants don't control your feelings and neither do the other person's actions.

Meet your own emotional needs and just enjoy other people for who they are. You will actually get so much better at selecting for quality and attracting the right people than you are now.

Thanks for tuning in. If you want to turbo-charge the Unfuck Your Brain Process, you can download a free five-minute self-talk makeover at www.redesignyourmind.com/selftalksoundtrack.