

UFYB 59: Listener Q & A Vol. 8



Kara Loewentheil
MASTER CONFIDENCE COACH

Full Episode Transcript

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Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unf*ck 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 now here's your host, Harvard law school grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello my chickens, how are you guys? I am so excited to do another listener Q&A podcast and I want to tell you all, you all send me such good questions and if I don't answer your question, I wish that I could get to it. Just for this podcast, just like for this episode, I went through 20 pages, single-spaced, people's questions.

So you all have so many questions, which I love. I love that you're engaging the work, it's just not possible for me to answer all of them and I try to pick the ones that I think have the most general applicability and will be relatable to the most people. So if I don't answer your question, it's not because there was something wrong with it or I don't love you or I don't want you to get help. It's just that I'm only one person. If I answered every question, then I would just do nothing but record podcasts, but I have clients who need coaching and cat who needs feeding and all sorts of things.

Okay, so the other thing is that there might be meowing tonight. My cat is very vocal this evening. I saw my brother over Thanksgiving and we were talking about how like, what if our pets are trying to communicate with us and we're trying to communicate with them and like, I'm constantly saying to my cat like, "What? What do you want? How can I help you? Why are you yelling at me?" and like, what if he's just saying to me like, "What? What do you want? How can I help you? I don't understand you."

Or what if like, he says I'm hungry and I'm like, it's raining. What if we just can't communicate because we're just speaking two totally different languages? I kind of feel like that might be what's going on. That might be why he always seems kind of cranky. But he's asleep so maybe we're

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going to make it through this podcast but there has been a lot of cat chat today and I don't know what he's saying or what he wants.

So I got to tell you guys one other thing. On January 6, 2019, it's coming up, y'all, I'm teaching the Unf*ck Your Body Image master class, which is amazing. It's a two-hour workshop where we get really deep into body image. I get so many questions about body image and it's something that every woman who's alive basically and a lot of men and people of all gender identifications struggle with, and thought work is so transformative for it but I think that there are really stubborn thought patterns because we've had them for a long time and so most people just try to act their way out of it. They try to lose weight to feel better or dye their hair or get plastic surgery or just kind of like, fake it until they make it but then they never make it.

So in this class, I'm going to be taking you on a deep dive of how your brain has been trained to think, why you feel this way about your body, and how to reframe it with really concrete tools that you can then practice afterwards. So we're going to talk about like, what do you think about your body, how does it make you feel, why you're always comparing yourself to how other people look, why you even want to look differently than you do, why you feel so guilty and ashamed about how you look or how much you eat or whether you exercise or not.

And we're going to really also dig into what is it costing you. One of the reasons I'm so passionate about this is I just think like, women are spending so much time and energy thinking about how big their thighs are or what they ate the other day or whether they have to go to the gym or if they can have a donut. I'm like, we have some shit to do in the world. There is some stuff we need to get done. You have a bigger purpose than thinking about your thighs.

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And it's not because you're vain or selfish or shallow. It's you've been taught to think this way. You've been trained since birth to think this way. But it's so important to liberate yourself. And so we're going to talk about all of that, we're talking about all the misconceptions that like, if you love yourself, you'll let yourself go and what it is you think you'll get by looking a certain way and how your body image thoughts interfere with your sex life and with your professional life.

We're going to cover all of it and I'm going to give you really concrete tools to use. Like, specific thoughts to practice thinking and specific practices to use and specific exercises to take yourself through, and we're going to have live Q&A. So if you have a pressing question about body image and you want to get an answer and maybe even a little bit of live coaching, we're going to have time for that too, for sure Q&A. Live coaching kind of always just depends on like, what questions come up and if they require some coaching.

So it's going to be super fun, and I would hurry up and sign up because some of you may heard that I also did an interview about body image on The Life Coach School Podcast, and all those people are going to be signing up. I want you guys to get there, so hurry on up. So it's www.unfckyourbrain.com/bodyimageclass or just /59. So www.unfckyourbrain.com/59. That'll take you to the podcast page for this episode and there'll be a link in the show notes. Or just /bodyimageclass, you can sign up there.

Okay, now let's answer some questions. First one from New Zealand. By the way, I love how international this is getting. The group of *Unf*ck Your Brain* people, my coaching program, *Unf*ck Your Brain*, that's starting this week, they - like, half of them are from Australia. That's just amazing to me how it's spreading and I get to hear so many wonderful accents.

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Okay, from New Zealand. The question is, "Hi Kara, I have a question for a Q&A consideration in terms of self-critical thoughts and social anxiety. Does the same concept apply with self-love? Is it true that if you don't have self-love, you can't truly love another or allow them to love you in return no matter how perfect they may seem to be for you and how happy they make you? Or is this just a cop out? Thanks for reading. Hope to hear it online soon."

Okay, so I think this is a question about that thing that people say, which is like, if you don't love yourself, no one else will ever - can truly love you. It's obviously not true. Love is a feeling caused by your thoughts. If somebody else loves you, that's a feeling they have caused by their thoughts. So we all know people who hate themselves and have other people who love them, right? It doesn't even really make any sense.

And you can love someone else if you think thoughts that create love for them. So there's no magical equation where no one else can love you and you can't love anyone else until you love yourself in some like, transitive property way or something. So no, I don't think that's true. What I do think is true is that if you don't love yourself, it affects how you think about loving other people and I think it affects how you show up in your relationships.

Now, that still doesn't control someone else's brain. Someone else could still totally love you or the you they think you are even if you're like, being fake and not showing up as yourself and not being authentic. They could have thoughts that create love for the person you're pretending to be, but it won't really be you. So I do think that when you don't love yourself and you don't like yourself and you're trying to manage what everyone else thinks of you, you don't show up authentically, other people don't really get the chance to love the true you because they don't even get to know the true you

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And I also think when you're super self-critical, often although not always, that transfers into how you think about other people. So it may be harder for you to love other people unconditionally when you don't love yourself unconditionally. So I think that's true also. So I sort of think the answer's like, yes and no.

You know, no in terms of some like, magical equation where it's like, off on, you love yourself, you don't, other people can love you or not. But yes in the sense that all the parts that you do control, which is how you feel about other people, how you feel about yourself, how you show up in your relationships, your own self-loathing does kind of infect all of those if you have it.

But someone else could still love you. It's just that if you're not being the real you because you don't like yourself, they're not even going to be loving the real you. But love as a feeling for them is caused by their thoughts. It has nothing to do with you.

Okay, next question. I love this question. I was really excited to see it because I think it's such a good one. So the question is, "Dear Kara, thank you so much for the work you do. I've been working on retraining my brain along with mindfulness and it has been transformational. I've been married 13 years and my husband manages his mind intuitively. He doesn't care about what people think of him, what people say, or people's perception of him. He handles mountains of stress, sets and accomplishes goals, and has self-integrity up the wazoo."

I didn't know integrity was some a think you could have up the wazoo. "My question is for the people whose brains are less fucked up, is that something they're born with? Is that from a place of privilege as a white male with a good upbringing? Is it more common for men to manage their minds more intuitively? If so, would you call that nature or nurture? How do

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people like my husband exist with an unfucked up brain without any book reading, training, podcasts, or therapy?"

I love this question. So one thing that's always interesting to know is like, why do we need to know this, right? Why do we need to know why some people don't seem to think the way we do? Is it because we're worried there's something wrong with us and so we want to believe like, we're like, we have to figure out are we the fucked up ones or is it just that they're privileged, then I don't have to feel bad about the fact that I'm not like that.

So you always want to be curious. A lot of questions I get that are like, about other people, some of you have experienced this. Occasionally I'll write back and just be like, why do you want to know the answer to that? It's not about you. You're asking me what someone else should do or how does this work for someone else, and you always want to ask yourself, why do I want to know that? Why does that matter for me?

But I think what's really going on in this question is partly that we're like, why are we like this? So yeah, there are people who are just naturally a little bit more like this. Now, I don't think it's that they're naturally managing their mind. I think it's just they're not having the thoughts that we do that need to be managed.

So for instance, someone could be very laidback and chill and happy with their life the way it is and not take things personally and not worry about what other people think, but if they tried to stretch themselves and set a new goal or go after something that scares them, it would totally bring up a whole bunch of thoughts they'd have to manage. So like, not having them in any given snapshot moment or even in their life so far doesn't necessarily mean that they're actively managing their mind.

It may just be that they have not sort of had those thoughts flare up yet, but if you put a big challenge in front of them or you made something difficult

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for them, they would. So that's one thing. I do think a lot of it is socialization. So I don't know that it really has to do with your upbringing necessarily. I mean, yes, some of us are taught to think a certain way but I do find that women in general, more than men, have at least the sets of thought patterns that I really work with.

There are also lots of men who have these issues and people of any gender identity. So I don't think it's like, only women are like this. What I do find fascinating is I think a lot of - and maybe it goes the other way gender wise too, but I just happen to know more female life coaches - that a lot of women who have minds that they really need to learn to manage and then became coaches because they loved it so much, they're often partnered with people who are naturally like this.

Like, are just pretty chill. Don't have to manage their mind. I think that's fascinating. I think we like, kind of select for someone who's going to maybe ground us in that way, and that person's not kind of bothered by our craziness before we learn how to manage our mind. So I think it's like, all of those things. I think some of us are born with a genetic predisposition maybe towards anxiety or stress or depression, certainly the way that we're raised, what we're taught to think explicitly and implicitly, just by watching our parents and how they live their lives and what they say and what they think.

All of that impacts it. Socialization is a huge factor. The people-pleasing and sort of women are way more encouraged, I think, to put their self-evaluation and worth on what other people think. But there are certainly like, straight, white men who grew up with money and have these problems too. So it's not a full category, it's not just clear categories one way or the other. I just think it's like, some people happen to be born without those genetic predispositions and to people who also didn't have these kinds of thoughts and they escaped socialization in some way as that didn't teach them - they just so far so good for them.

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But again, that doesn't - if they're not actively managing their mind, it doesn't mean that they wouldn't see that come up if they hit something difficult or something challenging happened or they like, got - I definitely have known people who had all of those advantages and everything was a breeze for them and then something big happened like they got fired or they - somebody died. Something major happened and they didn't actually have the tools to deal with that because they had just been kind of accidental smooth sailing. So the answer is like, all those things basically. But I think it's a good question so I'm glad that you brought it up.

Okay. Oh, this is also a great one. I feel like this this podcast, I really kind of was picking questions about the process because I think they're super interesting for those of us who like to kind of nerd out about this a little bit. Okay, "Hi Kara, I love your podcast. I've shared it with all my closest friends." Thank you, letter writer, and also, this is a perfect segue to remind you all to go leave a rating and review in iTunes because we're going to get to 200 before we stop talking about it.

Quick background, iTunes removed most of the keywords, it's harder for people to find the podcast when they search. I'm on a global mission and I need you all to help me, and when you leave ratings and reviews, it helps people find the podcast. So go do that. Alright, here's a question.

"I just wanted to ask, is it normal while managing your mind about certain thoughts to really quickly switch in and out of your go-to emotional unmanaged thoughts and your rational and managed thoughts? I'm finding that one second I can be really emotional about a thought and want to do things to teach a person a lesson or show them how they're wrong, but as soon as I'm onto myself about it, I can switch to a new thought, that's just her being her, and really know that I have no place in controlling someone's behavior and I can easily then think my managed and considered thoughts. Is this common? Is it just practicing managing your mind that eventually switches your go-to response to be your managed thoughts?"

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Yes, this is a great question and yeah, that's the answer. So this is totally normal and in the beginning, you feel a little bit like, up and down, up and down because you are thinking your old thoughts and you are kind of doing it unconsciously and then you notice you're doing it and then you think your new thought on purpose, then you feel better, and then as soon as you try to do something else and your brain is distracted, you go back to your old thought.

So sometimes I describe it when I'm talking to my clients, I tell them that it's like, the way it felt to me was like you're on this path of sanity for like, a moment and then you wander off in the brush. So imagine you're in a meadow or a swamp or something and it's like, in the beginning, you wander off and you don't even know you've wandered off and six weeks later maybe you wake up and you're all covered in scratches and mud and you're like, "Wait, there was a path somewhere." You have to like, claw your way back.

Then over time, the amount of time that you're off wandering in the swamp unconscious gets shorter and shorter and in the beginning it's like, you can only stay on the path of sanity for 10 seconds, and then it's 20 seconds, and then it's 30 seconds, and then it's three minutes, and then it's five minutes, and then it's a whole hour, and then it's a whole day.

And the time on the path gets longer and longer and the time off the path gets shorter and shorter. But that's exactly what you're describing. It's like, you have your go-to thoughts that are unconscious, you fall back into them and you notice they're happening, you switch it on purpose, think the new thought, feel better. And like, get back to kind of calm. It's not always about feeling better in life but in this situation it is. That's a good proxy.

You're feeling all grippy because you want to change them and then you just snap back to sanity when you think the new thought that you don't need to change them and that it's none of your business. So yeah, and you

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just keep practicing and eventually your new thought becomes your default thought, and that can take honestly anywhere from like, a day to 10 years.

I don't know about 10 years, but it really depends on how deep the thought groove is, which just means like, how often have you thought the thought before, how much is it something you think about, and sometimes that kind of happens like, over time without you even noticing and then you just realize that oh wow, my new thought is the only thought I have about this now. So yeah, totally makes sense. Great question.

Okay, here's another - this is also the cliché episode, not that your questions are cliché. Like, people asking about kind of clichés that they hear. So this questioner says, "Hi Kara, hope you're great today. I was just listening to your massive action podcast, which I love, as I do all of them. Just wondering about finding love. It's something I've wanted for a long time but everyone is always, 'You can't make it happen, it will come when it's ready, it will happen when you least expect it, if you look for it it will never happen.' I'm putting myself out there with a guy at the moment. I hope my action pays off. But what do you think in response to all the clichés that basically leave me feeling desperate?"

Okay, so what am I always teaching? Is a thought helpful? If you feel desperate, is that thought helpful? Is that going to get you what you want? No. So I don't believe any of that shit. You can't make it happen. Here's why I think it happens when people least expect it. Because this is what most people do is they don't know about managing their mind.

So most people who are "having trouble" finding someone or they haven't found someone as soon as they want to or whatever, they get increasingly bitter and jaded about dating, they also get increasingly anxious and hysterical. Every date is like, so momentous, there's all this baggage. They're not managing their mind at all. Any time it doesn't work out, they're in despair, just proves that they're going to be alone forever.

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So dating becomes such a dramatic thing for them and they get super grippy about it. Grippy is a technical term. No. I always use that and I don't know how to describe it but it's just like, when you're - like when you're trying to grip onto something, it's like when you're grippy, it's like I think of it as little raccoon fingers. You're like, holding on to something for dear life. You get all weird and like, desperate about it and you like, can't let go of it and you're kind of holding on for dear life. That's what people get like about dating.

And of course, that makes them act like a lunatic, and I have been that person so I'm always saying it about myself first. But like, a ton of anxiety and acting weird and over-reading things and overreacting to stuff and just kind of acting nuts and feeling nuts. And then they finally give up on dating and then they meet someone. But it's not because they gave up. It's because for them giving up meant stop being insane about it.

Stop obsessing about it and fixating about it and like, projecting a ton onto random strangers they've just met and taking everything too intensely and making everything mean something and making it really emotionally dramatic. They were producing all this negative energy and all of this agitation that was making it impossible for them to have a relationship with anyone because number one, they just couldn't even connect to anyone because they were all in their heads, and number two, of course, it's not that attractive to the other person.

So I think that that's what people mean when they say like, oh, it comes when you stop looking, when you least expect it. That's only true if you are acting - if you were like, not managing your mind and so your results were you being kind of agitated and feeling desperate and feeling tons of anxiety and like, just everything being this fever dramatic pitch and then you finally - or being really jaded and ugh, there's no one, everyone's terrible, and finding fault with everybody.

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Whatever your negative story about dating was, when you let go of trying, those people sometimes find someone because they've like, stopped being so stressed out about it. So when it happens, it like, snakes up and surprises them and they haven't kind of messed it up with their thought patterns.

So that's what I think about that. I 100% recommend that if having a partner is important to you, that you get out there and take the massive action. But super important, we're going to talk about this a lot in the body image class. It's like, why do you want to lose weight and look different? It's because of how you think you're going to feel. So it's like, we're ashamed about our bodies and we think the solution is I'll act my way out of it by losing weight so I can think different things.

And people do this with relationships also. I feel ashamed and I'm anxious that I'm broken and there's something wrong with me and I'm not good enough, so I'm going to act my way out of that by finding a partner so that then I can believe a positive thing about myself. So you do have to know why finding love is important to you.

If you try to massive action it to like, massive action getting something to change your shame, that's not going to work. Massive action has to come from a managed mind where you know why you want to find this thing, you know how much energy you want to put into it, and you know that is not going to change your life.

I mean, actually it will like, literally change your life because there will be somebody else in your house, but it's not going to change - it's not entering the fourth dimension where life is Technicolor and you're always happy and feel great about yourself. So you do have to know why, but yes, I'm all about the massive action and those clichés I think are about people who are not managing their minds.

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Okay, so one more for today because I think this is a great question a lot of people have. "Hi Kara, I've been listening to your podcast and I love them. I have a question about a problem I've been dealing with. I wondered if you might broach it in a future episode. I've been working very hard at managing my mind and I feel like I'm going a good job. I feel less stressed on a conscious level every day. The problem is I dream about a particular problem even though I've been managing it the rest of the time. When I dream about it, my dream is very vivid and upsetting and can ruin the tone I try to set for my day. Do you have any advice?"

So this is a great question and a lot of people experience this. If you have a lot of anxiety, you start managing it while you're awake but your unconscious mind is still thinking those thoughts when you're sleeping and so it like, comes out in your dreams. So first thing I would say is just keep at it. If you are truly managing your mind during the day and not just like, stuffing over it, if you really are reducing your stress during the day, it will start to sink in at night also.

Your body is just very used to being super stressed out and processing that stuff in dreams. So keep at it and over time that will go down. The other thing is that you say, "It can ruin the tone I try to set for my day." So part of your problem here is that you're giving those dreams way too much power. If you wake up and you had that dream, then you got to decide on purpose what you want to think about your day.

Your dream can't ruin the tone you set for your day. You're giving your unconscious mind so much power there. You're in charge of the tone you set for your day. So you might want to have a go-to thought that you practice when you wake up from one of those dreams that reminds you that it's just a dream and that your brain's just trying to work it out and solve a problem for you, but you're going to solve the problem better consciously and here's what you're going to think about it.

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So don't tell yourself that having the dream like, ruins all that good work because that's not true. You're letting it ruin the tone and so you need to do some thought work and manage your mind about that. The dream is just the circumstance. It happened, I had the dream, now what am I going to think about the dream and about the day? Take back control of that.

Okay, alright my dears. Unf*ck Your Body Image master class, January sixth. Check it out. www.unfckyourbrain.com/bodyimageclass or just /59 for the podcast page. I'm really excited to see you guys there and answer your questions and teach you how to not spend 2019 worrying about what size jeans you wear because you've got more important shit to do. Alright, I'll talk to you guys next week.

Thanks for tuning in. If you want to start building your confidence right away, you can download a free confidence cheat sheet at www.karloewentheil.com/podcastconfidence.