

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

[UnF\\*ck Your Brain](#) with Kara Loewentheil

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

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? It is early in the morning here, which is not my normal working time, but I'm just having an opportunity to manage my mind because Con Ed, which is the local utility here has been tearing up and drilling the street outside my apartment now for weeks. It seems never ending and finding a time to record the podcast when it's quiet is a challenge, so I got up early to do it today.

And of course, I had forgotten that even though they're not working yet, they've installed a steel plate that's not fully bolted to the street, and so every time a car goes over it, I can hear it go like, thunk. So it's so fascinating because I noticed as I was getting ready to record that I was like, starting to feel frustrated every time a car went over the thunk.

I was like, oh my god, I can't believe another car is going over that, which is like a hilarious thought to have. Like, right, well I live in Manhattan and there's cars and I know that thing is there. But my brain still wants to tell me that like, something has gone wrong and this is unacceptable and I could get angry about it.

It's like the brain's life motto is nothing too small to resist reality. Like, there's like, no issue too minor for your brain to throw a tantrum about. So, just keep an eye out for that. That's my advice to you today about your brain because I manage my mind all the time. I'm a professional, and I still this morning was like, getting myself slightly bent out of shape about a sound wave from the ground.

Even though the truth is like, you guys don't care. It's not like you come to this podcast for the pristine audio recording and my poor podcast editor

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

cares of course because this is his profession, but he's used to me. This is just how I roll. The point of this podcast is to change lives, not to win an Emmy.

So, if you guys hear a little thunk today, you just get to practice managing your minds, just like I am. Alright - that was a loud one. We're going to do some listener Q&As today. Got some great questions and we're just going to dive right in.

Okay, here's our first one. "Hi Kara. I have a question. How do you deal with a coworker who's constantly correcting you? I'm 35 and a woman and he's in his mid-60s. He doesn't correct my work, however he constantly says things like, you should never say the word always, or I overheard your phone call, what you should have said was actually blah, blah, blah, or if you study DISC, you will learn that you are an I personality."

Okay, side note from me, Kara, I don't know what that is but now I'm fascinated and I want to know all about it. Okay, back to the letter writer. "I do quite well at my job, I'm always open to constructive criticism, but how on earth do you deal with unsolicited advice? And it is constant. I have been able to manage my thoughts so far. I know he's just trying to help, but can't I just be blunt and tell him I don't need his advice? I'm a little worried because we work together and I'm trying to just keep the peace."

So here's why I picked this question, and the next question also is a little bit about boundaries because I want to kind of teach you guys - I don't know if it's like, the second level or just explaining again like, an aspect of how you set a boundary or how you basically ask someone to behave in a different way, which is really what's going on here.

So here's the thing. She says, "Can't I just be blunt and tell him I don't need his advice?" And my answer is like, sure. Go ahead. I am not the arbiter of the universe. You guys don't need my permission to do or say anything. I

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

tell my clients this all the time like, yeah of course, do whatever you want. The question is do you know your thoughts and do you like them?

So in this case, you just want to know why do I want him to stop talking to me like this. Now, if you've truly managed your mind, like you're not angry at him about it, you don't make it mean anything about you, and you really would just like him to stop because it's like, if somebody was singing songs in your office all the time while you were trying to work and it was distracting, you would ask them to please stop doing that.

If it really is totally emotionally neutral for you, then go ahead. Your problem here, dear letter writer, is that you say, "We work together and I'm trying to keep the peace." So your problem is that you want him to stop but you don't want to risk that he's going to have any negative thoughts or feelings about you asking him to stop, and that of course, you can't control.

So here's the thing whenever somebody wants to act their way to solve a problem, especially with someone else's behavior or they want to like, physically get away from their own problem like with their job or whatever, what I always say is like, you can totally do whatever you want. You are going to have to manage your mind either way.

It's like we think that if we take action to change the circumstance, then we won't have to manage our mind anymore. But that's never true because the circumstances don't cause your thoughts and feelings. It's your brain and that stays in your head.

So in this case, either you're going to have to manage your mind about the suggestions he's always making, or you're going to have to manage your mind about your fear of how he might react when you say something or how he will react if you say something. And again, he'll be reacting to his own thoughts. His thoughts will cause his feelings. You don't cause them. But you are going to have to manage your mind about his response.

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

So, you just got to pick which kind of managing your mind you want to do. But just be clear with yourself that just like you can't control whether he wants to talk to you about this stuff, you can't control the peace. You can control your own peace. Like, when we say keep the peace, we're implying that there is a peace outside of us that everybody is participating in that we need to maintain.

But unless you're literally in a war, that's not true. And even in a war, you still have to manage your mind. The peace you mean is your own mental peace, which is all you care about because that's all you experience, and you're the only one who can keep that peace.

So there's a world where you say nothing and you feel peaceful and there's a world where you say nothing and you feel agitated all the time. And there's a world where you tell him to stop giving you advice and you feel peaceful, and there's a world where you tell him to stop giving you advice but then you don't feel better, you just feel agitated in a different way about his reaction or his response or should you have said it or whatever.

So the peace can only exist inside your own mind and you just have to decide what work you want to do. You can always ask someone else to change their behavior. But what I suggest is that you only do it when you have gotten to a place where you're clear that you are not going to put your own emotional state on whether they respond the way you want. So you're not telling yourself that they have to respond a certain way for you to feel a certain way.

Okay, so here's the next question and it's kind of similar. That's why I wanted to do them together actually because it's just flushing out other aspects of responding to other people's behavior. So the subject line to this one was is there ever a grey area between a boundary and managing your mind.

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

So I'm just going to say no, there's not. I'm going to read the question and explain. So this letter writer says, "Hi Kara. I listen to your podcast to and from work and something has made me reflect over the past few days. I know you will read this and say I am one of those people who accept I need to manage their mind but say, but what about this situation? My particular situation concerns both my partner, who can be very rude. I don't mean in an obscene way, but in a way where they ask you a question, you start talking, and then he talks over you. I know I'm filtering this through years of being on the receiving end of sexism, but I can't help but think that anyone would think that is bloody rude."

Okay, "I understand I may be misunderstanding, but I doubt it. He's bored by what I have to say before I even say it and the last time this happened, I treated it as a boundary violation and stopped the conversation. I'm just a bit confused on whether it was my reaction to the behavior which was unacceptable, or his behavior, or both. Is there ever a time to say beyond the obvious physical violence, et cetera, that a boundary violation is the right way to go? That I want better than this? At which point in a relationship, how can you get beyond wanting that person to change, accepting I have no control over their thoughts and feelings?"

Okay. So there's a couple of questions embedded in this, but we actually have to start with the initial premise. You really believe that he's being rude, so you are not ready to create a boundary because you don't actually see that it's a neutral circumstance. And what I think is so interesting about this and the reason I wanted to read this letter along with the last letter is that you say, "I'm confused on whether it was my reaction which was unacceptable or his behavior or both."

What if none of them are unacceptable? You really want there to be a right answer. You said, "Is there a time to say a boundary violation is the right way to go?" You are so embedded in this thought system still where there's a right and a wrong, and so he needs to be wrong so you can be right that

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

a boundary is appropriate and that his behavior is unacceptable so you are correct and proper in having a boundary, and that's just not how it works.

His interrupting is not rude. That is an optional thought that you have. Maybe a better way to say this is his interrupting is neither rude nor not rude. It is just neutral. It is just a thing people do. But you are really committed to the idea that it's rude and you're trying to kind of provide evidence for that, like she gave me a whole example that I didn't read to you guys because I just wanted to keep it concise.

You want to give me evidence for how it's rude and you want to bolster your case. You say, "Wouldn't anyone think that's rude?" So actually, fascinatingly no. There's been a lot of anthropological study for instance about interrupting in Jewish culture and that in Jewish culture interrupting is not perceived as rude. It's actually like, a rhetorical practice or a habit within the subculture where people interrupt each other all the time and it's not considered rude.

So now you're thinking, well okay, but I'm not Jewish. But that's not the point. The point is that a person interrupting is totally neutral and people interpret it different ways. And probably some Jews do think it's rude and then some people who are not Jews don't think it's rude. But the point is that a whole group of people could think it's not rude and do in fact because it all depends on how you interpret it.

So, you're not ready for a boundary because you still think he's being rude. You think that that's unacceptable and you think the real problem is you think one of you has to be right or wrong. You think my reaction was unacceptable or his behavior was unacceptable, and you think boundaries have to do with when things are unacceptable in some objective sense.

But they're not. If it was like that, you wouldn't be confused about it. A boundary is a decision you make about what you want to be around. When

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

you are able to come from that place of total unconditional love for the person and the behavior, knowing that they're going to continue doing it, that you just don't want to be around it but that there's nothing wrong with the behavior, nor is there anything wrong with you, and that everybody could have a different response to this. That the boundary is not an objective or appropriate or any kind of like, definitional thing where we know which ones are the right ones or when you should have them.

So you don't need a boundary. You have a lot of self-coaching to do about this. Once you are able to accept it as neutral and able to love him unconditionally even though he interrupts you, you may totally decide you know what, I don't really want to be in a relationship with somebody who interrupts me. That's just like, not fun for me, just like, I don't know, I wouldn't want to be in a relationship with somebody who smoked in the house. I'm just not into that.

You may totally decide it is a boundary and then you're going to either have to enforce a boundary or decide to leave the relationship or whatever you're going to do. I'm not saying - sometimes people misinterpret managing your mind to me and so you never take any action and you just stay in any situation forever. That's not what I'm saying.

What I'm saying is that you aren't ready to decide how to act about it because you're still mixed up in your thoughts and feelings about it. Whenever you're trying to act your way away from a feeling or away from a thought, it gets messy, it gets confusing, then you don't know if you did the right thing. You end up in doubt and recrimination around it and you just carry all of that mental fuzziness or cloudiness to the next time it happens.

That's why it's just not effective. So your homework is to work on the idea that there's no such thing as a correct time to have a boundary, that there's no such thing as somebody's behavior having to be unacceptable, yours or his, and that interrupting is truly a neutral circumstance and that it is your

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

thought that he is rude, and that thought is your problem and that's why you can't decide what to do about it.

Okay, next we have a great question from a listener who came to the body image class. I love this question so much because it's just such a beautiful example of how our minds have blind spots about whatever our own shit is. So like, we think everybody's examples are fine but then we don't think it works on us.

Okay, so she says, "Thanks to your brilliant podcast, I'm able to use thought work to manage nearly every aspect of my life, except for one. I still struggle with my relationship to my skin. I have acne scars, eczema, and sometimes have red swollen pimples on my otherwise acceptable face" - which is an interesting way of saying that. We'll come back to that.

"And I feel a lot of shame about it. I took your body image class but I had trouble relating to the examples and using the tools offered. While it's definitely believable that some people might like or prefer fat bodies or big noses or older women, to use a few of the examples none of these things are as universally pathologized as skin diseases. Telling myself to believe that some people are attracted to facial scars and acne just isn't believable. The thoughts I tend to use are, people can love me even if they dislike my skin, or I accept that I'm too embarrassed to let my boyfriend see me without makeup. That's a big improvement from simply hating myself. But something about merely tolerating shame feels like it falls short of what's possible. What are my other options? Is the goal to love my imperfect skin? Is there a way to stop feeling pangs of shame when I notice the people I love glancing down at my skin when I'm talking to them? If I can't change my face and I certainly can't change others' reactions to it, what can I change to be more comfortable in the skin that I was dealt? Thanks for any guidance you can offer and thank you so much for all the life changing work you put out into the world for free. It's such a gift."

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

Okay, I love this question, my dear, because you have such a blind spot about your skin that you have decided that it is an exception to all the tools, which we all do. There's so many ways you're doing this. So first of all, first you say, "On my otherwise acceptable face," which I think is fascinating and I think you should make a big list of what you think is acceptable or not on a face because that would be really interesting for you to see.

But you say, "It's believable that some people might like fat bodies or big noses or older women, none of these things are like skin diseases." That's what you call it, right? That is a thought. I think you think that that's a circumstance. There are fat people who 100% believe that no one can be attracted to fat people. In fact, that we have an entire society that is completely aimed around vilifying fat people and telling them that they're terrible.

So I think you think that like, for fat people or people with big noses or people who are getting older that it was just immediately easy to believe that people could be attracted to them because that's true whereas in your case, it's different. I think that's what you think it is.

But that's not the truth. That's not how it works. For somebody who believes that they are fat and that no one can be attracted to a fat person, it feels 100% real. And they would 100% say the same thing to me, that bad skin, that's no big deal. There are models who can wear makeup on it and I can't hide my fatness and there's a multi-billion-billion-dollar diet industry devoted to telling me that fat people are bad and people with bad skin aren't told that they're giving themselves diabetes and that they're a threat to public health and that they're disgusting.

Somebody who is completely in their thoughts about their fat being a problem for what other people think about them and their fat being unattractive would give me a whole laundry list of reasons that skin is no big deal but fat is universally vilified. And somebody who had a big nose and believed that that was a problem would give me a whole list of

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

distinctions about why having a big nose was actually a problem that couldn't be changed and that people hate but everything else was okay.

And a woman who's struggling with getting older would give me a whole laundry list of all the social conditioning and pressures and beliefs about older women. I would completely think like, yeah sure, well if you're fat or have "bad skin" or whatever, but if you're young, it doesn't matter as much. So that's the first place that you're stuck. You are just so deep in believing your own thought about your skin that you think that it's a circumstance.

And you're using words like universally pathologized to make it seem like that's an objective truth that you just are telling me. But of course, that's not true. And you say, "Telling myself to believe that some people are attracted to facial scars and acne just isn't believable," as if that's just not possible. Of course, that's possible. You're telling me that out of the billions of people in the world, there is no one who has a thing for acne. I 100% don't believe you.

There are people who have a thing for anything. Anything. So that is the first place that you're really stuck is that you are believing your own lie that skin is a special category that everyone hates that isn't like being fat or having a big nose or being old. As long as you believe that lie, you will never feel better about this.

So you have to be willing to give up that lie. You have to be willing to believe it's possible that your thoughts about how universally despised acne is are not objectively true and might be your brain trying to justify feeling so much shame about this or why ever it's doing it. Maybe you were taught that at a young age. Whatever it is, you have to be willing to believe it's possible that you're wrong about that rather than take that as a fact and then - you're trying to silver lining it. You're not going to get anywhere.

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

That's really the big place you're stuck. Now, there are smaller things going on here. You're interpreting a lot of what happens around you as being related to your skin so you're like, "I notice the people I love glancing down at my skin," and you assume that they're thinking something bad.

So number one, you think they're looking at your skin. I will 100% predict that at least most of the time that's not truly what's happening. They're just looking at your face probably because they love you. And if they are looking at you, that they're just - that they're thinking something negative.

So let's just imagine if you and I went on two identical dates and the guy paused and looked at us while he was talking, I might think, "Oh, he's thinking about that he thinks I'm pretty," and you would think, "He's thinking about how bad my skin is, he can tell." Either one can be true for either for us probably, but you're always going to think it's about your skin.

So because you have decided that first of all, you have a skin disease, which by the way, again, optional way to think about that. Eczema might be sometimes - might be defined as a skin disease. I actually haven't looked up the dictionary definition of disease recently, but you don't have to constantly think of yourself as somebody with skin diseases.

So many people have acne and acne scars, but you're thinking about it as if this is like this thing that's wrong with you that's not wrong with anyone else. If acne is a skin disease, then 60% to 80% of people in the world have this skin disease, so it really actually can't be that universally pathologized or rejected.

So, all of this foundation story you have that you have skin diseases, that it's universally pathologized, that that's so terrible, that's leading to the next branch of it, which is the stories you have that everybody's always looking at your skin and thinking something negative about it. Because the truth is

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

you're the one who's thinking something negative about it. Not everybody else.

Your boyfriend is with you, he knows what your skin looks like, even if you're wearing makeup. Presumably, at some point he's seen you like, come out of the shower or maybe not, but he's seen you up close and he's seen you wearing makeup. You are believing that you have to present this perfect façade and then you project your shame onto everybody else.

But so many people have acne scars, so many people have eczema, so many people still have active acne. I know so many women in their 30s who are like, oh, now I have acne again? Fun surprise, body. So many people do, and your belief that your skin is "bad" and that it's universally pathologized, everyone hates it and thinks it's disgusting, and that it's different, like you're the special snowflake compared to people who are fat or have big noses or who are getting older or alternately abled or whatever else, that this is the one thing nobody could possibly like, those thoughts are where you're tripped up.

So, you didn't misunderstand any of the tools I taught, but you are just choosing to believe that none of them apply to you. So this is your big blind spot. The goal is to love your skin and the goal is to stop calling it imperfect. Now, that's not where you are now, but you say, "Is the goal to love my imperfect skin?" It's like, it's so baked in for you that there's something wrong with your skin and the goal is truly to see this the skin you have and it's beautiful in its own way.

Right now, that's not possible to you but that wasn't possible to me about my weight. Like really, I want you to try to not just dismiss everybody else's things as if those are objectively easy to love. Like, think about all of the social messaging about weight and jiggly skin and fat and how disgusting it is. When I started this goal, this project, I wasn't just like, oh sure, lots of people are attracted to fat bodies. I guess mine can be beautiful. I don't have to hate it at all. Done.

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

That is not what happened. I had to start with I'm going to try to accept that this fat tissue exists on my body, as opposed to saying to myself, oh, fat is universally pathologized as an obesity disease and whenever anyone's looking at me, they think I'm fat. That's what I used to think but then I had to work on it bit by bit.

But yeah, the goal was not to get - the goal is to love it and not to believe it's imperfect. Now I don't think, oh, I love my body even though it's imperfect and fat. So yes, the goal is to love your skin, full stop. No other words in there. But you're not ready for that. Right now, you just need to practice being open to the idea that you may be wrong that your skin is somehow different and especially terrible compared to every other thing humans feel insecure about.

Because that's this way you're giving yourself out of working on it. And I don't mean that like you're trying to. This is just how your brain is working. Your brain is like, I don't want to expend any energy having to change this, I've been thinking this for a long time, I'm just going to tell myself that none of this applies to me.

It's so much easier for your brain to just find a reason that you're different and none of the work will apply to you than to actually contemplate that it might be wrong. Remember, our brains do not like to be wrong. They think that's dangerous, and you have been believing these thoughts about your skin for so long. So your brain is going to really resist them, to changing them.

But that is the key that will unlock everything for you is being willing to contemplate the idea that you are wrong about how "bad" your skin is about how it's "universally pathologized" that you have a disease. All of these foundational thoughts about your skin and what other people think about it, which is really what you think about it. That's where you have to start.

## UFYB 69: Listener Q & A Vol. 13

If you are not willing to be open to changing those foundational thoughts, you won't really ever get above people can love me even if they dislike my skin because that's where you are. You're trying to love yourself while also disliking your skin. So that's where you got to start. Learning to accept your skin, then learning to like your skin, and then learning to love it.

Alright my dears, that was a little bit of a long one but I just think we all have these blind spot things that we tell ourselves are like, different and the tools don't apply to, and of course, nobody would love and is obviously disgusting, so I just thought it's such a useful examples and I wanted everyone to hear it, and thank you for sending it in.

Okay my dears, I will talk to you 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.karaloewentheil.com/podcastconfidence](http://www.karaloewentheil.com/podcastconfidence).