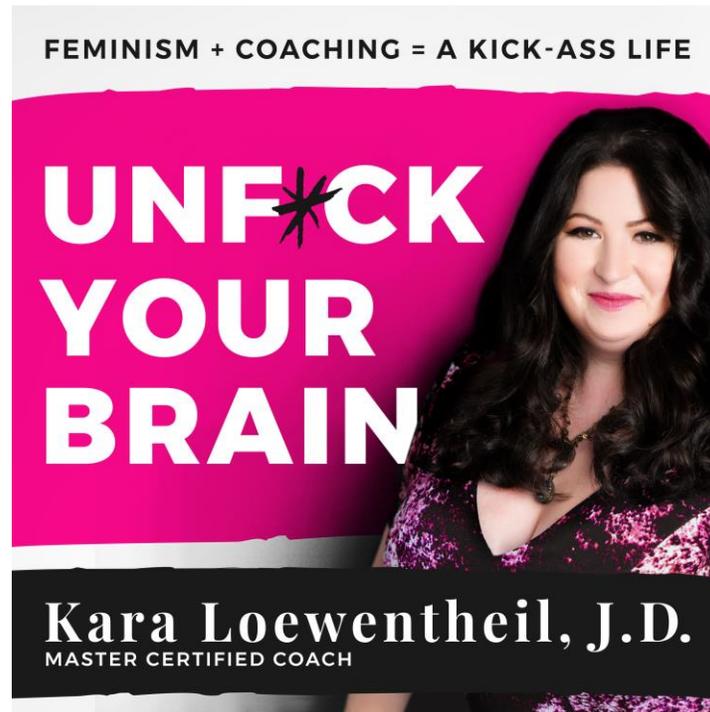


UFYB 16: Love Yo' Self



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 here's your host, Harvard law school grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello, my chickens. I am in such a good mood today. I spent a lot of today coaching my UnF*ck Your Brain students in our group Slack. I don't know if you guys have used Slack, but it is my favorite thing in the world. I love using it for coaching so my students and I can have these really rich conversations and connect and learn and coach pretty much every day. It's kind of my favorite thing.

I mean, I love coaching calls, but I used to always feel like when I went to therapy that it was like you saw the therapist once a week, or even every other week, and like on a Monday, I might be losing my shit. Then by the time I had a session on Thursday, I had kind of gotten over it. I mean, maybe I'd resolved it, maybe I hadn't, maybe I'd just like moved on. But I would show up to my therapy session and just be like, "I don't know; everything's fine." I can't be the only person who had this problem.

So I love using Slack to talk to my clients, my students – I kind of use those terms interchangeably because those of you who are working with me are both – and being able to really be there when they are in it; like when they are freaking out, when they are spiraling out, when they are stuck. It's my favorite. It's such a good and rich and fruitful time to work with someone when they're really in it.

Anyway, I was in the Slack today and just feeling so, kind of, honored and privileged to get to do this work. We're like six weeks into the group that I started in January, and people are hitting their stride and having victories. People are having sex after long dry spells, people are stepping up at work

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and getting more responsibilities, they're writing novels and making art. They're getting their first coaching clients, they're negotiating for raises, they're leaving jobs that they hate; it's amazing. I'm just a little bit obsessed with them.

And I'm always just so amazed and grateful that this is my job and that I've built this life for myself. One of my coaches calls it staying in the miracle. And you guys know, I am not super woo-woo, so I don't believe in, like, miracles from heaven. But honestly, the miracle is making your own dreams come true. Like, there just is no better feeling than making your own dreams come true.

Like we all think someone else is going to make our dreams come true, like that job or that man or that lottery, or whatever it is. But there is like no better feeling than doing it yourself. No one can do it but you. And then the great thing is you just get to appreciate yourself for doing it. And so I feel like I'm really in the miracle today.

And because I am feeling myself for having created this amazing life for myself, I want to talk to y'all about loving yourself. Or as a more technical term, if you want to be more professional, we might call it positive self-regard. We can call it either one of those things.

You know, I think a lot of my clients and my students and my listeners think that I was just born really confident; like I came out of the womb just like this, or I just had to do a little bit of thought work to get here. And that could not be farther from the truth. My brain used to be just like yours. It was a nightmare up in there. It was like Pandora's Box in a bad neighborhood. My brain was totally out of control.

I was insecure and anxious about everything in my life; my work, my romantic relationships, my family relationships, my friendships, my body. Like, anything you can think of, I thought I was doing badly. If you had

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transcribed my thoughts, my favorite thoughts were probably a litany like, “I’m lazy, I’m not good enough, I’m too fat, I’m not pretty enough, I’m too loud, I’m too intense, I’m too much, there’s something wrong with me. I don’t have that mystery that other women have that make men love them.” This one was like really specific and weird, but I completely 100% believed it. This thought was one of my favorites. “I’m not smart enough. Someone is going to find out I’m not qualified. I should be working out more. I should be eating less. I’m gross, I’m disgusting, I’m too smart to be happy. Happiness is for stupid people.” I thought that one a lot too.

And that’s probably just a five-minute snapshot of my self-talk soundtrack. In other words, I did not like myself too much. I had a really negative self-regard. When I thought about myself, the thoughts were almost entirely negative. I didn’t think that I was valuable. I didn’t think I was worthwhile. No matter what the area, I was sure that I was inadequate and doing a bad job at it.

Now, obviously thinking this was wasn’t pleasant. It produced a lot of negative emotions for me every day; guilt, fear, anxiety, insecurity and most of all shame, so much shame. I think shame is just my ever-present companion. I just constantly felt ashamed of who I was and what I was like and how I looked and how I acted; everything.

So when I started doing thought work, I focused a lot on trying to get to a neutral vision of myself. I just wanted to not hate myself. I was not going for positive affirmation or happy blissful love for myself. I just wanted to feel like 40% less self-loathing. That was a big enough goal. And for a while, that was a really big goal. Just getting to a point where I simply didn’t hate myself as much was huge. And living a life where I had removed the moral obligation and blame that I was putting on all my actions was a big change.

I did feel a lot lighter; I didn’t judge myself nearly as much. I thought I was okay the way I was. I felt a lot less anxiety, insecurity and shame. I was,

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like, pretty happy. I was like, “Yeah, I think I’m fine. I’m fine. Like, I’m not terrible. I’m okay.”

Then during my master coach training, I had a retreat with my teacher, and over dinner, she asked me how I felt about myself. And I was like, “you know, I feel fine about myself. I think I’m fine.” And she said, “Just fine?” And I just sort of looked at her blankly. I didn’t understand what she was saying because fine was like a big accomplishment to me. I was okay. I felt neutral. That seemed great.

What else was I supposed to feel? That seemed like the best I could feel about myself. And she said, “What if you thought that you were amazing?” And I just, quite honestly, did not even understand what she was saying. My brain was so resistant to the idea that it just kind of went blank. So we talked about it more over dinner, but I was, kind of, the whole time was just like, “I don’t understand what you’re saying. I think I feel fine about myself. It’s fine; I’m neutral. It’s fine. I’m fine.”

And she was sort of like, “If you say fine again, I’m going to kill you. Stop saying that.” So she really challenged me to think about this, to think about what would it be like if I didn’t just think I was fine. What if I thought I was fucking amazing? So I did. I really, kind of, mused about that and I let it percolate also in my subconscious. Like, what would it mean to actually think I was awesome? What would it mean to be kind of in love with myself?

And today, I really can say that I think I’m amazing. I totally enjoy myself. I appreciate myself. I’m like a little bit in love with how fabulous I am. Or, in a more professional tone, I have a positive self-regard. So I want to talk to you about what positive self-regard is, why it’s important and how you can start creating it for yourself.

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So positive self-regard – lovin' yo'self – is seeing yourself in a positive light; not a negative light, not just a neutral light. And those of you who are still working on neutral, that's totally fine. That is a step on the way, but it's good to know where you're going.

Positive self-regard – loving yourself – is when you think of yourself the way you think about someone else who you think is awesome. Like, if you ever kind of had a crush on a new friend because you just think they're so amazing – you're just kind of obsessed with them. You want to know about everything they like. You want to know about everything they think. You want to talk to them all the time.

Obviously, this can happen in romantic relationships too, but in that context, there's sex and physical affection, which can, of course, produce a lot of oxytocin. There's a lot of honking going on today, you guys. I'm just going to assume that the New York cabbies also agree with me that self-love is amazing, because they will not shut up.

So when you've had a crush on a friend – like a girl crush or a guy crush or a whoever crush – when you've met someone new and you're just like, “What, they're so cool. I just want to know everything about them. What do they think about this and what do they think about this and I want to hang out with them all the time and why are they so smart and they're so funny and they're so cool.” It's an amazing feeling.

Having that feeling about yourself is positive self-regard. When you have that, you see all your best qualities. You give yourself the benefit of the doubt. You take your own side. You have your own back. You see all the things that are great about you. You are compassionate about your shortcomings and you don't think that they outweigh your positive attributes.

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Now, I want to be clear, positive self-regard – loving yourself – does not mean becoming a delusional narcissist. That is what most of my clients say when I introduce this concept. It's so fascinating. I tell them about the idea that they might like themselves and love themselves no matter what they do, and their immediate response is to worry that they're going to become a narcissistic dictator.

It's just so telling because it means that their brains are so deep in self-loathing that they think that just liking themselves no matter what would be a personality disorder. They think that would be like a DSM diagnosis. But really, who doesn't want to feel like they're awesome and amazing? We run around trying to constantly get other people to think we're awesome and amazing. Like, I need those people to think I'm awesome and amazing, but for me to think I'm awesome and amazing myself, that would be so egotistical and terrible. It doesn't make any sense.

You can't control what those other people think of you. You want them to think you're awesome and amazing so you can feel good about yourself. What if we just leave them out of it, let them deal with their own shit, then you think that you're awesome and amazing. It's a lot more direct.

But a lot of us are really resistant to it. I think the reasons are really interesting; so some of us resist it because it just seems like a bridge too far. We're so deep in self-loathing that actually liking ourselves, much less loving ourselves, seems impossible, and if that is where you are on your journey, that's okay. Feeling neutral about yourself is a good first goal. It's an important stage in the journey. It's okay if that's where you are.

Some of us, though, are resisting the idea because we think it's important to criticize ourselves. People do not want to give this up. It's so interesting how the brain works. People are like, "Well I'm constantly self-critical and judging myself. I feel terrible." People sign up with me – they pay me money – to help them with this problem. And then when I suggest they stop

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doing it, they're like, "Oh no, I got to keep doing that. Criticizing myself is really important; I have to keep doing that."

Okay, why? Why would it be important? Because some of us are still invested in the idea that shame and anxiety will produce positive change. So we think, if we allow ourselves to be how we are – which, side note, we already are that way – if we just accept that reality and love ourselves, we will stop improving; we will be terrible. We won't have the motivation of self-criticism and self-loathing.

So number one, this is totally circular thinking. You only want to improve yourself because you think then you'd like yourself. So if you just liked yourself already, there wouldn't be any reason to have to improve yourself. It's like if you are running really hard and not getting somewhere, "Hey, I have a plane. I can just fly you to the destination. Let's just get on." And you're like, "No, no, no because I got to keep running so I can get there." And I'm like, "No, we're just going to fly there. You could just be there right now." And you're like, "No, no, no I can't stop running because I need to get there." That's what that thinking is.

You only think you need to improve yourself so that you can feel good about yourself. The reason you don't feel good about yourself is the self-critical thoughts you have that you need to improve yourself. If you just give those up, you'll feel fine. It's totally backwards.

Number two, everything I've taught you on this podcast is that shame and anxiety – negative emotion – does not produce positive action. Criticizing yourself just makes you feel worse and makes you act in ways that manifest more of the behavior you're criticizing. For instance, if you yell at yourself for being unproductive, then you feel ashamed. Then you avoid your work and zone out, because that's what humans do when they feel ashamed, and now you're even more productive.

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So even if it were true that you did need to change, criticizing yourself would not help you get there. It has the opposite effect. But here is the real deeper truth – positive self-regard – loving yourself – isn't just important because it feels better. It also helps you achieve things you never thought were possible. It is truly the opposite of what you think. You think that driving yourself with self-criticism is the way to change your life, and it is the opposite.

I was a decent lawyer and academic while I hated myself. I mean, it was like a lot more painful and difficult than it needed to be because of my thoughts, but I did pretty well; not because of my self-critical thoughts but in spite of them. I was able to push through a lot of self-criticism to get the job done because it was structured and there were all these external deadlines and I sort of had to turn things in and I could sort of motivate myself with anxiety. It was all way more difficult and complicated than it needed to be, but I could basically get it done.

I could never have created my coaching business if I didn't like myself. It just would have been literally impossible. I would have had nothing to offer my clients, I wouldn't have believed that I could do it and I never would have succeeded. I had to take so many risks and take so much action and put myself out there in so many ways.

If I loathed myself, or even just felt neutral about myself, I could never have accomplished everything that I have. And even if I had succeeded somehow, I wouldn't have been able to enjoy it. Feeling proud of myself for what I've accomplished is the best feeling in the world, but you can't feel self-loathing and proud. And you can't even really feel neutral and proud.

Feeling proud of yourself only works when you like yourself; when you love yourself. It's important because, number one, it feels terrible to hate yourself. Number two, you really can't have the life you want while you hate

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yourself. You can't hate yourself into the life you want; into feeling proud of yourself, into accomplishing your dreams. It just doesn't work.

So, how can you start to love yourself? You know I'm not going to tell you positive affirmations; that's not how we roll around here. But I am going to give you a fun exercise to do.

So before I give you the exercise, I just want to say – even just being open to the idea that you could have a positive self-regard – that it could be possible to think you are awesome – is a good first step. I'm going to be honest with you – I started doing this work fairly far into the self-coaching process, and I didn't actually do a ton of thought by thought work to go from neutral to thinking I was amazing. I just had to open my mind to the idea that that concept was even possible, because it had just really not occurred to me. I was just so pleased with myself for getting to neutral.

It just never really occurred to me to think about what if I thought I was amazing. So just being open to the concept is a step in the right direction. But, you guys are maybe at a different point in your process than I was, so I'm going to give you a fun exercise to do.

Some of you may have heard of Martha Beck. She's a master coach and she's a master coach instructor, she has a column in Oprah, she's probably one of the most famous life coaches around apart from Tony Robbins. So Martha Beck teaches a concept called if You Spot It, You Got It.

And the idea is basically that when you see something in someone else, you are seeing a quality that you also have. Now, this can be negative when you are really irritated with someone else. It's a projection. You're seeing something that you don't like about yourself. But it also works for the positive, that when you see something in someone else that you admire, you're seeing a quality you also have but that you're not yet able to recognize in yourself.

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I really love this concept. I found it to be true in my own life and my coaching. And Martha went to Harvard too, so you know, if two Harvard trained life coaches agree, then we have to be right. How many of us can there even be?

So we're going to use it here. So here's how it works. I want you to think of someone you love and admire; a mentor, a friend, a girl crush, whoever it is, a boy crush, a non-binary person crush. Write down five things you think about that person; positive things, things you admire, things you respect, things you love or appreciate. And then, you're going to rewrite that list in the first person.

So, for instance,- if your list is she's smart, she's funny, she has a lot of compassion for people, she gives great advice, she's beautiful – now, by the way, I didn't do this on purpose, but that list is totally what I think about myself. So that's how this exercise works. I like made up someone in my brain to write this thing about, then I just wrote things I think are true about me. That's how you know I now think I'm awesome.

Okay, so if your list is – I didn't notice that until I started talking through this part. I love my brain. So, she's smart, she's funny, she has a lot of compassion for people, she gives great advice, she's beautiful. Then you're going to write those thoughts in the first person. I'm smart, I'm funny, I have a lot of compassion for people, I give great advice, I'm beautiful.

Now, I totally believe all of these about myself, as we can see, that's apparently why I came up with them. You may not believe all the thoughts that you come up with yet. But if you accept that Martha and I know what we're talking about, and Martha basically invented life coaching, so you should definitely believe her even if you don't believe me. You notice these things because you have a spark of them too; you're looking for them.

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And what if you looked for evidence that you had those qualities too? How would your self-talk change? How would your conception of yourself change? How would your relationship with yourself change? What if you decided that you had your own back the way you have your friend's backs?

It doesn't mean you don't ever see a way that your friend could have acted differently or that you might have not agreed with their approach. But when your friend does something you don't like or don't understand or don't agree with, you're not immediately like, "What a fucking bitch. I hate her. She's such a waste of earth. She doesn't deserve any love." Which is what you do to yourself.

Self-love is not something you create overnight. But even just thinking about the concept of believing you're awesome will start to prime your brain to develop that belief system. And let me tell you, once you believe you are amazing, the whole world opens up for you.

If you've listened to the podcast and you're thinking, how is that even possible? Then, lady, you have got some work to do. And it would be my honor and my pleasure to teach you how to do it. You can sign up for a consultation call with me at www.unfckyourbrain.com/application. I will see you there.

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.