

UFYB Bonus: My Story



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. So this week, I'm going to do something a little bit different. It's been amazing to look at the numbers and see that so many new people are listening to the podcast, and I'm excited to have our little flock grow. It's now quite a large flock.

I know that some of you who are newer to the podcast may not know so much about me or my story and kind of where I came from. And so today what I'm going to share with you is a little bit about that story, and what you're going to hear was originally recorded as a video for my email list.

So those of you who are on my email list know that I send out little extra teachings and lessons and videos sometimes, and so this is where this came from. And it's not going to affect what you're going to learn from it, but you will hear me mention that there was a link in the email. So at the end of this recording, I'm just going to give you the link that was sent in the email for you to take the next steps if you want to.

It's a little mysterious, you're going to have to listen to the recording to hear what I'm talking about. And for any of you who are like, "Wait, I want to get emails with extra videos and stuff," you can just go to the podcast description and click on the link there and you'll be taken to a page where you can download a free confidence cheat sheet, and when you do that, you end up on my email list.

So no worries, I got you. Give this a listen, see what you hear that sounds resonant for you. I think a lot of you will identify with whether or not we have the same kind of upbringing in terms of like, where we lived and what we did with our lives. We probably had the same thought patterns. And

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really the reason that I want to share my story with you guys is that I want you to know that the way that you feel now that like, heaviness and pressure and resignation and sadness and guilt and anxiety, just that cloud does not have to be there forever.

It's not permanent and your brain can change. That's why I have this podcast to teach you the tools and today I just want to talk to you a little bit about my own journey so that you can see how I developed this work and why and what it can do.

I grew up in Baltimore actually and I grew up in a family where there was - everybody was very educated and had achieved a lot and there was definitely an expectation of high academic performance and high achievement. And I was just a neurotic little mess, my old childhood, who knows why, I probably just came into the world that way.

And so I always did very well in school and I was very high achieving, but I had a lot of anxiety. I was a huge procrastinator even in middle school and high school, I never did things until the last minute, and I was always really, really worried about what my teachers thought about me and what my friends thought about me and what my parents thought about me, what everyone thought about me.

I definitely thought it was my job to keep everybody happy all the time, and I was very, very self-critical and self-loathing. I had an eating disorder in high school like so many high school girls unfortunately. I hated my body, I thought everything would be perfect if I was just thin or my hair was straighter, and now it's blown out so it looks straight but it's actually curly.

All of that kind of like, classic high school and middle school drama. And although I had good friends, I always felt like maybe they didn't quite like me or I didn't quite fit in. I wasn't good enough, I just had so much self-

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doubt and self-criticism. And of course, I always felt like, "Well, when I get to college it'll be totally different."

Shockingly, it was not different. It was the same. But even more pressure. So I continued the same patterns, I did have friends and I made friends but I always felt like I wasn't cool enough or the people I wanted to like didn't like me. I never felt like my romantic relationships were good enough or that the boys I wanted to like me did like me. I still had a really terrible relationship with my body, I was binging and purging still in college.

And I got good grades but it was always a torturous process. I would put things off until the last minute and then I was famous for like, writing my whole papers the night before they were due. And I always got by okay so even though it was a very unpleasant way to live, I wasn't really motivated to change it in that I didn't know how. I just had no idea.

And so after high school I moved to New York and I got a job at Planned Parenthood. So I was a media writer, and I sort of had this vision of my life living in New York and what that would be like, and you'll notice a pattern here, right? At every stage of my life I was like, once this circumstance changes, I will feel totally better.

Once I get out of high school, once I get out of the house, once I go to college, once I move to New York, once I have a boyfriend, okay, once I lose 20 pounds, right? And I would do all those things. I moved to New York, I got a good job, I got the boyfriend, I even lost 20 pounds, and yet I still felt like shit most of the time.

And it's crazy to look back now and realize like, I didn't even realize how terrible I felt because I had never really felt free of that guilt and that shame and that anxiety and that insecurity. They were like this black cloud that just moved along with me over my head, right? So I just always thought that was normal.

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And like, sometimes the clouds would part a little, I'd feel a little bit better, but until I learned how to coach myself, which I'll tell you about in a minute, I just didn't even know that there was life outside the cloud. So now when I look back, it's kind of both sad but amazing to me that I spent so much time and so many years of my life just thinking like, "This is how I'm always going to feel."

I just had this like, ever-present sense of guilt. Like, whatever I was doing, I always felt like I was doing something wrong. I should be doing something else. I would feel guilty if I decided I was going to the post office and then I didn't go. Like, nobody cares except for me when I go to the post office, but that's how intense my kind of self-criticism and guilt and shame patterns were that I would feel guilty no matter what I did, basically. And it just felt like this kind of lead blanket always on top of me.

So I've always been really interested in psychology and of course I had gone to therapy to try to solve these problems, and then I kind of discovered life coaching and was intrigued by it. And I started working with a coach, and this is not a story in which the first coach I worked with totally solved my problem. The first coach I worked with was a lovely woman. She was employed by like, a coaching company here in New York, who's method is basically like, try to treat yourself like you're a Pavlovian dog.

It was like, try to bribe yourself to do what you want or punish yourself for not doing what you want. And I was always kind of like, okay, but I know that I could just not do the thing, whatever it is, I didn't smoke but let's say you're trying to quit smoking. I could just have the cigarette and not inflict the punishment on me because I'm not three years old, right?

So it did not work for me at all, but it got me really interested in like, what would work, right? It sort of made sense in terms of the way we're taught to think, which is like, criticize yourself and punish yourself and reward

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yourself, like, treat yourself like a Pavlovian experiment, and like, that will help. And like, that totally did not help.

But that got me really interested in like, what would help. So at this point, I had already gone to law school and gotten in a clerk to New Orleans for two years and you know, law school was just like being in college for me in the sense that I was like, constantly feeling stressed out and anxious and doing shit at the last minute, and constantly comparing myself to everyone else around me and thinking they were so much better than I was.

At every stage no matter what I achieved, like, okay I went to Harvard but everybody else here is smarter than me. Like okay, I got appellate court clerkship, which is a hard thing to get for those of you who aren't lawyers, but you know, it wasn't this one, it was that one. This one's not as good as that one. It just was constant that compare and despair.

And then I moved to New Orleans to clerk for a judge for two years, I came back to New York, which is where I worked with my first coach, and then while I was living in New York I was litigating at a reproductive rights organization and then I was an academic. So during that whole period, I started to get really interested in like, okay, well like, berating myself and beating myself up has not helped, criticizing myself has not helped. All this external shit I've accomplished I totally thought was going to help has not helped.

Are we noticing a theme? Like, there's got to be something. You know, I think I always did have this belief that like, life did not have to be this painful, for someone who really had no - like, I had enough food, I had shelter, I had a job, like, there was no reason that life should involve this much suffering other than my own brain.

So I did a lot of studying and research and I worked with different kinds of coaches and therapists and teachers and meditation teachers and yoga

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teachers, I was like, totally on the seeking path, not to get too woo-woo, the analytical seeking path for me.

And then what I finally figured out were two things. So number one, I did find a teacher who taught me some cognitive strategies. So she really taught me - she was the biggest influence on me and she taught me what determines your experience of life is your brain. It's your thoughts. If you want to feel and act differently, you're going to have to change your thoughts.

So that totally blew my mind and really opened me up to the beginning of the possibilities, it totally explained why trying to cheer myself up like a Pavlovian dog had not worked, right? Like, of course telling myself I'll punish you if you do this, well, I already felt terrible anyway, one more punishment wasn't going to make a difference, right?

Or telling myself like, you can have a reward if you do this, I was never changing the thought that made me not want to do the thing. Whatever the thing was, whether it was like, go workout, or write a cover letter, whatever it is, I was never changing the thought that was producing the disinclination to do the thing.

So layering up punishment or reward on top just didn't help at all. So she really taught me that the brain, your thoughts, are the key to your whole experience of life, and that changing your thoughts is the way to change everything else. That was huge. And I used that work and it helped some. And then I started running into this problem where I didn't believe the thoughts that I was trying to believe.

So like, the system and the framework made sense, but I couldn't figure out how to actually believe the new things I wanted to believe. And that is when I really kind of put together and I don't want to say invented because I'm

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sure people will have thought neutral thoughts before, but in terms of coaching it's really not out there that much that I've seen.

I'm the only person I've seen focusing on this, but that is where I really came to this understanding that like, the key to actually rewiring your brain was not just trying to think different thoughts, not just trying to think positive thoughts, but learning how to think neutral and baby step thoughts. I am just like a super analytical person with a very overactive brain. Like, all my clients are too, and we just couldn't go from my body's disgusting to my body is amazing.

It just didn't work. We had to go through little baby neutral steps of thoughts along the way to, that's a human body, that's my stomach. A lot of people have this stomach, some people have this stomach and are beautiful, right? Like, we had to go through all those little steps. So that was really the total lightbulb moment for me of like, oh my god, I figured something out that other people need to know and that no one else is teaching.

Like, this is the thing, I need to share this. And so once I figured that out and I was able to use that technique on every area of my life. I completely stopped binging and purging, I learned to love my body, took some time, it wasn't overnight, but those latter thoughts, those neutral step thoughts absolutely worked and got me there.

Totally changed my dating life, that's like a whole other video I could record, but my dating life was a total disaster because I was constantly chasing validation from other people and I was using every romantic relationship as just a test of whether I was good enough or not. Like, it really had nothing to do with that other person or even intimacy. It was just a test for whether I was good enough or not.

So changing my thoughts around dating and validation completely transformed my love life. I found an amazing partner all around - this is

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around the same time when I really first figured this out about neutral thoughts. It totally changed my professional life. I was an academic at the time, completely procrastinating, writing a law review article, and I was able to complete my article, I started doing a lot more in my job.

I ended up getting recruited to run a think tank, this is before I became a coach obviously, and so totally changed my professional life and like, tripled my income. And it really changed my family life, which is not something I talk about on the podcast as much, you know, because it's sort of a - we all have our stories to tell, and it's not - not all of them are my stories to tell, but it really revolutionized how I related to my family and made time with them so much more pleasant and enjoyable for me because I stopped viewing everything they were doing as being about me and a referendum on me.

I stopped taking everything personally, which of course, because it never was personal, that was just in my brain. So it really changed every area of my life and then as I was working through all these areas of my life over the kind of following two years, I just became so passionate about sharing this with other people and I sort of was like, you got to stop coaching your friends. I mean, that's fun, but like other people need to know about this.

And that's how I ended up becoming a coach. I just realized that I had found this thing, this tool that nobody else was really teaching the way that I saw it, and that was going to be so important for all those people out there like me who do want to change and do believe it's possible but are so skeptical of all the woo and all the overly positive thinking and the mantras and the affirmations, and really just want a concrete, actionable like, cognitive science based way of doing it.

And so I decided to become a coach and share it with other people, and that's what I do today. I teach women how to create self-confidence by changing their thoughts. And self-confidence is truly the key to everything

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else you want in your life. You may not even see that now, but everything you want to feel good about your abilities, to feel competent and empowered in your career, to feel like other people respect and value you, to have the kind of romantic relationships you want, whether you're looking for one or you're in one that's kind of lost its flavor for you, to have better sex, to feel better in a bikini, to have a better relationship with your family, to make more money or manage your money better, like all of this stuff goes back to what you make your life and your circumstances mean about you and your own self-confidence and your own value.

Because when you don't believe in your own self-confidence and value, you are just super busy running around, hustling around, taking everything personally, making everything about you and whether you're good enough and looking for evidence that you're not good enough. It completely gets in the way of everything else that you want to create in your life, and it makes you kind of miserable, right?

The level of anxiety and guilt and shame that so many women just accept as like, a normal part of living, like that weight on you that you just feel like is there and you can't get out of, it's not permanent, it's not natural, it doesn't have to be there. You actually can live without that weight pressing you down.

So that is really my message for the women of the world, and that's what I do. I teach you how to get out from under that cloud. So if listening to this story you've been thinking like, "Oh my god, that sounds like me," or, "I want to learn how to do that," I have the answer for you and this is a way for me to learn about you as well.

So my coaching program is called *Unfuck Your Brain*, it's pretty straightforward. I teach you how to unfuck your brain, which means how to see the ways that your own self-criticism and patriarchal conditioning - again, that's another whole video we could do, but social conditioning

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teaches women to be insecure and feel bad about themselves and not value themselves or their abilities.

I teach you how to see the ways those thought patterns are holding you back and then how to actually rewire your brain. We have a ton of fun, we laugh a lot, you can tell I have - there's a lightness to me now that didn't use to be there, but we also do really deep work, and it really will transform your work relationships, your work product, your career, your romantic relationships, your family, it is deep, deep work that really changes your whole life.

And it's the kind of transformation that I didn't use to think was possible. Like, I thought happiness was for dumb people, but it's really not. You can be smart and happy. So if that sounds good to you, I would love to talk more with you and learn more about where you are and see if you're in the right place for this work, and if this work is the right thing for you.

So at the bottom of this email there's a link to an application you can fill out where you'll just answer a few questions and I will review your application and let you know what I think. And for all the perfectionists out there who are scared to fill out an application, I promise you because I control my own thoughts that I have decided that I love all of you and that you are amazing and brilliant and wonderful no matter what you think.

So the application isn't like, are you good enough for coaching. It's really about this work helps everyone and I offer a few different varieties, and it's really just about like, where are you in your life, what are you working on, and what's the best way for you to move forward that I can offer you.

It's not like trying to get into law school or whatever else. It's not about being rejected or accepted, it's really about me just seeing where you are and what's the best way for me to help you. The more I know about you, the more I know about the best way I can help you.

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So come fill out an application, I would love to talk to you, learn more about where you are in your life and really help you envision what your life would be like if you truly believed in yourself the way I believe in myself and the way I believe in you.

So for those of you who listened to this episode and heard my story and heard me mention a link that was originally sent out in the video email with my life story in it, I wanted to just let you guys know what that is, which is www.unfckyourbrain.com/program. So it's just unfckyourbrain.com/program.

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.