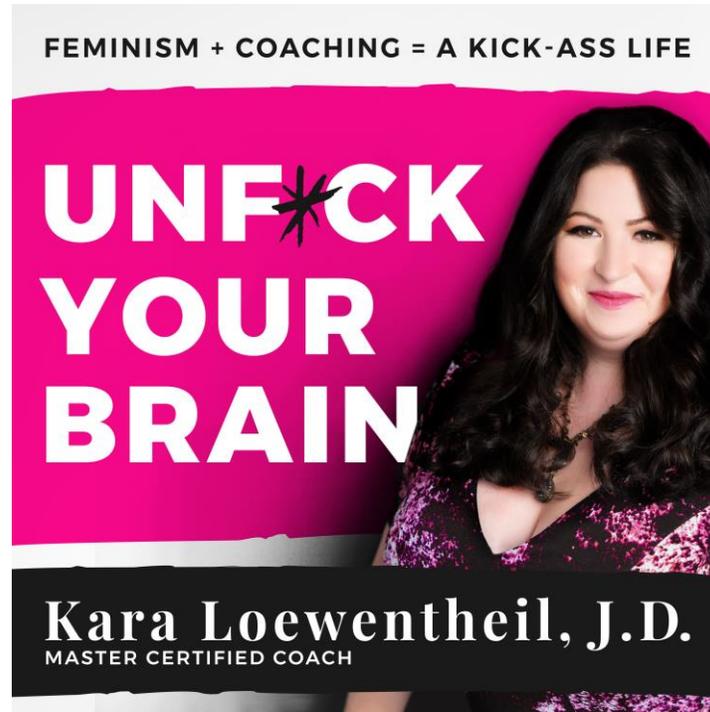


UFYB 30: Pleasure



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

Hello, my chickens. I want to thank all of you who emailed me or messaged me on social media about last week's podcast. It really has been a wild ride of a year and I am so grateful to have you all with me.

And by the way, if you're not following me on Instagram, come hang out on Instagram with me. My name is just @ my name, KaraLoewentheil, all one word, no special characters or anything. And I post little mini blogs there if you like to read stuff on your phone, and I definitely use Instagram stories a lot, so you can see what's going on with me in my life. Like, a bunch of you voted on my poll whether I should write a book or not last week. So definitely come hang out on Instagram, @KaraLoewentheil.

Okay, so we are getting a ton of new listeners every week now. I don't know what's going on, I think you guys are recommending the podcast to your friends, which is awesome, but so far in May, we have the amount of downloads we had in all of March. So basically, like doubled in two months. That is kind of wild, so thank you for doing that.

And for those of you who are new, two things I want to make sure you do. Number one, you may want to listen to the episode that's called My Story. That will kind of give you some background on who I am and where the podcast came from.

And then the other thing is if you're new, make sure that you download the confidence cheat sheet I offer. It's totally free, it has three written coaching exercises you can do, like worksheets for you, to really implement what you're learning. I mean, if you just think about like, when you were learning languages, you can't just talk, right? You kind of have to write things down

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too. So the link for that is www.unfckyourbrain.com/podcastconfidence. Or if you're listening in iTunes, you can just look at the podcast description, it's at the end there.

Alright, so those are all my preliminaries and ways for us to hang out. Today I want to talk to you about something that I think a lot of women have trouble with, and just been thinking about it as kind of summer is coming, although you would not fucking know it because I looked at the weather report yesterday for New York for the week and it was just rain all week. Just a sea of rain. So I don't know if I'm going to see the sun again ever.

I guess I will. Next week I'm going to Dallas to teach at a coach training, a coach training where I was certified a few years ago. So I guess it's going to be sunny in Dallas, but I'm not sure if I'm ever going to see the sun again in New York. But theoretically, summer is supposedly coming, and summer is a time that everybody kind of like, loosens up a little, you start wanting to like, stay up late and be outside, and drink wine on a roof deck somewhere and wear less clothing, right?

People start kind of flirting and just everything's growing, right? Spring, it's nature. So today I want to talk about something that a lot of women have trouble with, and that kind of brings - comes to my mind when I think about summer, and it is not how you look in a bathing suit, which might be what you think is coming. It's the concept of pleasure.

So what is pleasure? The dictionary defines pleasure as a feeling of happy satisfaction or enjoyment. Most often when we talk about pleasure, we mean physical pleasure. We mean something that tastes good or looks appealing or smells good or feels good on our body. We mean sex or food or drink, or even just that ah feeling your body gets when it's relaxed in nature. All those things are pleasurable.

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And they're pleasurable for good reason. Humans are innately wired to seek pleasure and avoid pain. We like things to feel good. And we've evolved so that we find things that keep the species going to be pleasurable. Food, sex, natural habitats. Any primitive human that did not like sex, or eating, or drinking water would not pass on their genes because they would just die, they wouldn't reproduce.

So we're wired for pleasure. But about as long as we've had societies, most of them have tried to curb and control women's pleasure. Society teaches women that their pleasure is dangerous and that it's morally problematic, that there's something wrong with it.

Think about the bible and Adam and Eve. We are taught from such a young age that women's curiosity and desire for pleasure are what ruined the world. And even if you didn't grow up Christian, which I certainly didn't, you live in a society that absorbed these teachings and is fundamentally shaped by them.

The dominant culture in America and many other societies was really indelibly shaped by Christianity. And in America, it's not just Christianity, but Puritanism. So talk about a culture that is not too fond of pleasure. Just look at the name, right?

So we're taught that women's pleasure is dangerous and that it's out of control, and that women must control their pleasure in order to be socially acceptable. Why does slut shaming exist? Because a woman who follows her own sexual pleasure against social norms is a dangerous creature. She threatens to destabilize the whole patriarchal regime.

And it's not just sex. Think about all the dessert advertisements that describe products as naughty or sinful. They're all aimed at women, and all of this language aligns pleasure with religious transgression. And that's

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because they understand that culturally we are trained to see women's pleasure as transgressive.

It's also fascinating how many of the same advertisements focus on portion control. Little indulgence, just a little sin. Women are taught that too much pleasure is a bad thing, and it will bring social disgrace, right? Don't be a slut, don't be a glutton, don't spend too much money, right? So you have to measure it, you have to portion it out, you have to control it.

You can enjoy sex but only the right kind of sex with the right kind of people and not too much. You can enjoy food but only the right kind of food at the right time and not too much and only if you keep you figure. Women are socialized constantly to see pleasure as a dangerous negative thing, and to tightly control its role in our lives.

And because we are taught that pleasure is this indulgent kind of morally dubious thing, we then start believing that we have to earn it. Women think that they have to earn pleasure in a way that men generally do not. Men are not socialized to question pleasure and to control it. In fact, men are generally taught that their pleasure, especially their sexual pleasure is the most important thing in the world, right?

But women are taught that their pleasure is morally dubious and dangerous, that too much of it is sinful. And you may not believe these literal words, but you have definitely absorbed these teachings. You may not use the word sinful in your head, but do you feel guilty about pleasure? Do you feel guilty about eating a piece of cake? Do you feel uncomfortable or awkward telling a lover how to give you an orgasm? Do you feel bad if you prioritize fun and pleasure in your life over obligations like work or family responsibilities?

If so, you have absorbed this ideology. So here's what I want you to consider. You do not have to earn pleasure. You are entitled to pleasure

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just because it is one of the best things about being in a human body. Your capacity to experience physical, mental, and emotional pleasure is god given or evolution given or universe given, or whatever you think of as the source, you come into this world equipped with the ability to experience pleasure.

Think of a cat or a dog who find pleasure in lying in the sun, or eating, or drinking water, or cuddling with you, or running through a park. Animals experience pure physical pleasure with no qualms about its morality or having to earn it. And humans are animals too.

You do not have to earn your pleasure. You do not have to be a good enough person to deserve pleasure. You do not have to complete every obligation you can imagine or that other people imagine for you before you are allowed to have pleasure. You do not have to eat your dinner before your dessert.

Pleasure is a gift and a birthright you have just because you exist. And there is no moral worth in denying it to yourself and you don't have to do anything to earn it, either on an existential level or on a time and sort of schedule management level.

So that's takeaway number one. You do not have to earn or deserve pleasure. It is not a moral issue. Now, when you start to explore allowing pleasure in your life, you're going to notice that society tells you a lot about what you should think of as pleasurable. And this is where we come to takeaway number two.

Society's going to tell you that eating certain foods, watching TV, shopping, beauty treatments, that certain things are considered pleasurable. And those are generally going to be things that induce a huge hit of dopamine and require you to spend money to experience them.

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So I want you to think carefully about false pleasure versus real pleasure. When you are consuming false pleasure, you are checking out. You are not tuning in. When you are consuming false pleasure, you feel exhausted afterwards, not replenished.

It has nothing to do with the activity. It has to do with the approach. A false pleasure is a pleasure that you use to numb yourself or reward yourself or escape from yourself. A true pleasure is a pleasure that you immerse yourself in because you want to be fully present and alive in your body and in your life.

A piece of cake that you eat with your full attention is absolutely a true pleasure. Four pieces of cake that you eat standing up in the kitchen, watching TV to distract yourself from the cake which you're eating in the first place to distract yourself from your life is a false pleasure.

Sex that feels good where you're present and engaged and I mean engaged like paying attention, I don't mean engaged to be married, can be with a stranger. But sex where you are emotionally and mentally present and tuned into your experience is a true pleasure. Sex that you have with a stranger while you're drunk because you want someone to validate that you're pretty enough to fuck and where you zone out halfway through because it doesn't actually feel good and you don't know how to talk about it is a false pleasure.

A glass of wine that you drink with dinner in good company because it makes the food taste better can be a true pleasure. A bottle of wine by yourself at night because you don't know how to cope with stress in any other way is a false pleasure.

Buying something beautiful that you love that you've thought about, that you have considered the investment in because you want to have this beautiful object in your home to enjoy, that can be a true pleasure. Online

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shopping in bulk to distract yourself at the end of a long day is a false pleasure.

Now, listen because this part is really important. If you are engaging in these false pleasures, that does not mean that you are wrong or bad. It doesn't mean anything is wrong with you. I'm not saying you should not engage in false pleasures. I am never should'ing you. You guys are should'ing yourselves, right?

All of us engage in false pleasures, especially when we don't know how to manage our minds. That's all a false pleasure is. A false pleasure is just the canary in the coalmine telling you that something's happening in your brain and your body that you have not figured out how to handle. And your thoughts, your unmanaged mind creates a lot of anxiety and guilt and shame for you. So of course, you're trying to comfort yourself and numb yourself out.

But the solution to that problem is to manage your mind. Listen to the rest of this podcast, come work with me as a client, practice on your own, whatever it is. The solution to false pleasure isn't to judge yourself and beat yourself up for it. It's to manage your mind.

If you're using pleasure for comfort, then it's a false pleasure. And it's not really even comforting because you feel worse after. Think about it this way: when you try to use pleasure to fill a void or fix a lack when you're feeling bad about yourself or you're feeling kind of like you victimize yourself, you're feeling like, put upon or like, you've been wronged, when you're coming from a lack and then you reach for pleasure to comfort yourself, it doesn't work because it doesn't address the real problem, which is changing your thoughts.

Pleasure is not a solution to a problem. If you're using pleasure for comfort, that's when it's a false pleasure because pleasure's not the - the only

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solution, the only solution that pleasure is if the problem is you don't have enough pleasure in your life, right?

But pleasure's not a solution to some other kind of emotional problem you're having. When you use pleasure for comfort, it's a false pleasure. And again, there's nothing wrong with that, it doesn't make you a bad person. Again, humans do this, right? Children fall and scrape their knee, little babies, and then they want a nurse from their mother because they associate love and that feeding with comfort. Doesn't mean you're a bad person. It's a natural instinct.

The problem is just that it doesn't really solve your problem. When you're, you know, an eight-month-old and you bumped your head, that closeness does kind of solve your problem. You get oxytocin that reduces the pain, you feel better, you've moved on.

When you're a grown up and your problem is caused by your negative thoughts about your boss or your anxiety about dating or your negative self-talk about how you look, whatever it is, when that's the problem you're causing for yourself with your thoughts, you're causing all this negative emotion for yourself, pleasure doesn't solve that, and it doesn't really comfort you. That's why you feel worse afterwards.

Eating four pieces of cake standing up isn't actually pleasurable. It doesn't solve your problem. So that's why I say it's a false pleasure. We could just call it an ineffective pleasure, right? The false is not there to make it a judgment or to judge you for doing it. It just doesn't solve your problem.

When you try to use pleasure for comfort or as a solution to some other problem, it just doesn't work, and it's not really pleasurable. True pleasure involves being present and engaged. Think of how an animal experiences pleasure. They're fully in their body, they're fully present, they're enjoying embodiment for the sheer joy of it.

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False pleasure is escape. It's an attempt to escape. Doesn't work. You always end up back where you started. True pleasure is presence. And you do not have to do anything to earn the right to enjoy it.

Have a beautiful week, my chickens, full of pleasure, and I will talk to you soon.

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.