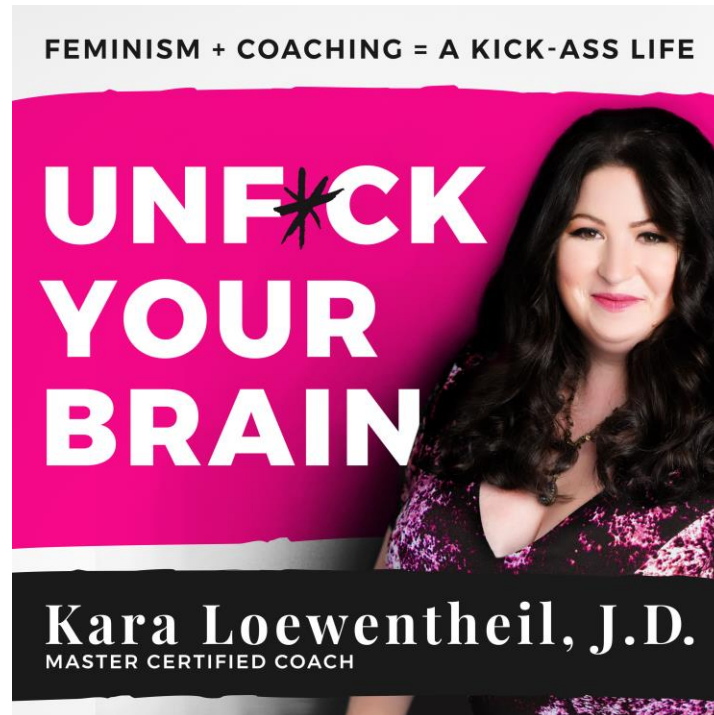


UFYB31: What About Sexism?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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UFYB31: What About Sexism?

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 am recording this podcast ahead of time because by the time you're listening to it, I will be in Dallas teaching at a life coach training. A few years ago, I attended this same training, although it was not in Dallas, and now I'm teaching at it, which is really kind of wild. Also going to be my first time in Dallas, but it seems like I'm going to mostly be spending at the hotel where I'm teaching.

But if any of you are in Dallas, then just know I'm close to you next week. So I love teaching of course, that's really what being a coach is, but I especially love teaching new coaches because I really love being an example of what's possible for them. You know, when you're starting out in any field, you have so many fears and worries and insecurities, especially if you have an unmanaged mind.

And it's so important to see people who have gone before you and who are real and human and not perfect Instagram celebrities, but who are succeeding and creating change in the world and creating successful businesses at the same time. I remember being just really inspired during my coach training and I'm just super excited to teach new coaches and try to inspire them too.

And serving as that kind of inspiration is something I really try to do in general in my practice. It's something that my teacher always said to me that I didn't understand until recently. She always says she wants to be an example of what's possible, and when I didn't feel successful yet, I didn't really understand what that meant because I just felt like the distance from me to her was so vast that she wasn't an example. She was just like, a different category of unobtainable success. Like, that was what my thoughts were.

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

UFYB31: What About Sexism?

But over the last few years as I have been coaching myself and building my business and really starting to see the results of all of my work, I've started to understand what that means, and I get messages from a lot of you telling me that you identify with my story and that I'm an example of what's possible to you.

And the reason that I love that is that it's not about being an example based on money or weight loss or external achievement or whatever else we think we should aspire to. It's about being an example of how to take responsibility for your own life and how to manage your own mind.

I'm not - the extent that I am inspirational, I'm not inspirational because of something that I was born with or lucked into or that someone else gave me. I am inspirational if I am because of the work that I've done and what I love about that is anyone can do it. It's not something I have that other people don't have, it's not some crazy talent like being the best tennis player in the world that no one else can have. It's just being an example of what happens if you take a standard person and teach her how to manage her mind.

I mean, standard is kind of a weird word, I don't know that I was ever kind of that normal or standard, but there's nothing about what I've done that someone else couldn't do too if they learned to manage their mind. So to me, that's what's so inspiring is that whatever I've created in my life, I really have created just through my own effort, and that's something I can teach other people. And it's not something you have to be born with and it's not something you have to be sort of lucky enough to get from your parents and it's not anything external.

So anyway, that is what kind of inspiration really feels like it means to me. And I've been feeling that way especially this week because I just am sort of graduating the first group of students who went through the kind of new and revised version of my coaching program, Unf*ck Your Brain, and seeing all the progress they've made is so amazing.

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

UFYB31: What About Sexism?

And seeing how many of them feel like they're ready to rock and roll. You know, when they start, everyone is worried about like, well, are there options for ongoing support and what about after the six months, and I think people don't believe me when I say like, "Yeah sure, I have some options for like, low level support afterwards but listen, you're going to be good to go really in six months."

People don't believe me but it's true. I look at my clients now, my graduating class and they're like, ready to rock and roll and they don't really need me anymore. And that's how it should be. I mean, I love them and I want to keep in touch with them and I keep in touch with a lot of my clients, but they know how to coach themselves. That's the point. They know how to inspire themselves with their own progress.

So that's the love fest for this week. I have a lot on my mind, you guys, I just have a lot to share this week. So that's not what we're going to talk about all day today. I'm going to talk about one of the most important questions that new clients often have for me. And given that I talk about feminism and patriarchy so much, it's not surprising.

The question is what about sexism? Because I teach that our thoughts are what determine our reality, but I also teach that structural oppression that sexism exists. So how do those two things go together and what are we supposed to do about sexism?

So first things first, yes, sexism, discrimination on the basis of sex and gender exists in the sense that there are people who have thoughts, sentences in their mind, about other people being less worthy or inferior based on their gender. There are people who think that women are not as smart or not as capable or not as strong or whatever else. And some of that's conscious and most of it is unconscious bias.

UFYB31: What About Sexism?

Those thoughts exist. And those thoughts create certain feelings, actions, and results for those people. But we still get to decide how to manage our own minds about that reality. So it's a circumstance that someone might decide to act a certain way towards you because of a thought in their mind that involved judging you based on something you can't control, based on your gender, or your sex.

And you can absolutely choose to be angry about that if you want. Any reaction you have is available to you, any feeling is available to you as a choice. I'm not telling you that you should or not feel any particular feeling. But I do want you to notice how you feel when you resist the fact that sexism exists.

You want to be very careful about what I mean and what you hear. I am not talking about taking actions that speak out against sexism. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about emotional resistance to the fact that other people have certain thoughts and take certain actions. So I'm not talking about political resistance, I'm talking about emotional resistance.

When you think about how unacceptable it is that other people have a different thought or a feeling from you, you are creating resistance for yourself. Whether you're upset that they're sexist or you're upset that they don't like the novel you published, or you're upset that they don't want to go on a second date with you, any time that you are resisting other people having a thought or feeling, you believe they're wrong and shouldn't be allowed to have it and shouldn't have it and should be different, you are creating resistance and emotional drama for yourself.

It doesn't matter what the thought or feeling or action they're having is. If you are resisting the reality that they have it, if you believe they should not be allowed to have it, that they are bad and wrong for having a certain set of words in their mind, you are creating suffering for yourself. And that suffering is not motivating. It is not energizing. It is draining and upsetting. It makes you feel disempowered and victimized.

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

UFYB31: What About Sexism?

Now, if you're someone who really believes that you are fueled by righteous indignation and anger, and that it helps you take positive action and you feel great about it, fine, go forth, you're probably not listening to the podcast. As someone who was in social justice, what I see is that really everyone I've ever met - although I'm open to the idea that there are other people who aren't like this - actually gets drained and burned out and resentful, that anger is - just uses up your energy and ends up burning you out, that resisting that other people disagree with you or have another position from you is just exhausting, right?

I used to do reproductive rights law, litigation, and then I did reproductive rights law and LGBT law policy when I was in academic work when I was an academic. So I have for my whole legal career, I worked in fields where people have very opposite opinions that they feel extremely strongly about. And it was totally standard that we made the other side's opinion mean something terrible about them and that we believed they were wrong for just having it. And we were all pretty much stressed out and burned out and exhausted. And I don't think those two things are unrelated.

So here's the other problem with resisting that other people have the thoughts they have and judging them for having thoughts. It perpetuates the belief that you have that certain thoughts are morally wrong. And the problem with that is that the person you use that against the most is yourself. There's a quote from aboriginal activists in Australia, and side note, that sounds like a weird place to say a quote is from but that's actually the preferred attribution.

This sentiment, this quote, this idea is usually attributed to a woman who is on record as saying she's uncomfortable with that because she thinks that it was really - the concept is from her kind of collective community and not from her and so it should be quoted to aboriginal activists in Australia. So that's where I'm quoting it from.

UFYB31: What About Sexism?

So anyway, the point is, the quote is about the idea that our liberation from bondage is inextricably bound up with the liberation of others. And I see that in this context in the sense that the more that you judge other people for their thoughts, for their feelings, for their ideas, the more you think they are morally wrong for having them, the more you are going to judge your own thoughts.

If you want to liberate yourself from the constant moral evaluation of your own thoughts and feelings, from the constant judging of yourself, you also have to release the constant moral evaluation and judging of other people. And that's true about like, how your mom dresses or what your brother's doing with his life or what your boss does, and it's true of people you think are sexist.

I cannot stress this enough because it's so easy - it would be so easy to take this out of context. I am not saying that you have to or should not care that sexism exists. I am not saying you shouldn't work on those issues. All I do all day is teach women how to overcome internalized socialization and sexism to feel better about themselves. Obviously, I think it's great to work on changing the world for the better to produce more equality.

But judging other people for their thoughts, hating them for their thoughts, resisting that they think that way does not change their thoughts. It's just like being angry at someone else doesn't punish them. Other people don't feel your feelings and they don't suffer from your thoughts. Only you do.

So spending your energy emotionally resisting the fact that sexism exists or judging and hating and resisting and resenting other people for having beliefs you don't like is a double-edged sword. The more you judge other people, the more you judge yourself, and vice versa, right? Just like the more compassion you have for yourself, the more compassion you can have for others.

UFYB31: What About Sexism?

So learning how to envision and work for positive change without resisting or hating what currently exists is a concept that tends to kind of baffle people at first and not just in the political sphere. It's the same reason that people have a hard time with the idea that you could absolutely love a partner and still decide to leave them. So many people run their relationships into the ground because they think they can't leave unless they hate something. Or they try to motivate themselves to switch jobs by focusing on how much they hate their job.

But it doesn't work. Focusing on anger and frustration and resentment doesn't actually motivate you. It burns you out and then you don't go home and go to a protest or start an organizing group or draft job applications or you know, go out and look for a new partner. You just binge ice cream and Netflix to take the edge off because you spent all day creating negative emotion with your thoughts.

The key to any kind of successful change, whether it's like, your own gym habit or social movement is learning to work towards a positive vision without resisting or hating what currently exists. Hating what exists and judging it burns up your energy and it doesn't motivate change.

You don't have to hate your husband to leave him, you don't have to hate yourself to change, and you don't have to hate the world and other people to improve it. You can grow and create change from love instead of from hate. And this isn't some kind of sacker and like, love everyone, just be nice, don't make waves kind of thing. Powerful love is truth and truth is disruptive.

If you're finding this concept hard to understand, I want you to think about someone inspirational who you admire. Let's take like, Martin Luther King Jr. who's often used as an example when we talk about social justice and love. Now, MLK spoke some truth and it wasn't always pretty. It was not always welcome by everyone around him. It was real talk. He did not say

UFYB31: What About Sexism?

just like, everyone love each other and be nice and we never have to have uncomfortable conversations, right?

MLK talked about his disappointment in the white moderate for being complicit with the status quo, right? He was not just saying like, everybody just get along and like, focus on the positive. That's not what I'm talking about. But when you think about his vision, when you think about why he was so inspirational, why so many people followed him is because his vision of a world came from love and a belief in a better future.

No one ever says, "You know, that Martin Luther King Jr., I think the inspirational thing about him was how angry and depressed and resentful he was." He just got so much done for the world by stressing himself out by hating everyone and then binging ice cream and watching Netflix to check out from his own brain at the end of the day.

That's not how it works. That's not how you create change. That's not how you resist inequality. People have a hard time with this concept because what they hear is that they should be okay with sexism and then they think that makes them a bad feminist or a bad person. But we are not talking about being okay with it in the sense of not caring about whether it exists, or not taking action to try to ameliorate its impacts.

We're talking about not emotionally resisting the fact that it exists. Hating something that exists doesn't make it stop existing, right? I have taught you all that so many times on this podcast in different contexts. Resisting something does not make it not exist. You don't have to hate something to change it.

Fundamentally, what will free you in this and every area is acknowledging that other people have the same spiritual or philosophical autonomy as you do to have their own opinions. Now, I have my own values and preferences, I have opinions that I prefer, I believe in justice and equalities,

UFYB31: What About Sexism?

those are values that I have. But I don't believe that they are somehow objectively more correct than someone else's opinion because there's no way for me to prove that.

And that is the key to it. It doesn't make me not care about working on change. But it takes me away from just resisting and resenting the fact that other people don't agree with me or judging them for having different thoughts. And it keeps me focused on the thing I want to create. What's the world I want to see? What's the good I want to do in the world?

Allowing other people to have their own opinions, which side note, they do anyway, they have their own opinions. You being mad that they have their opinions doesn't make them not have their opinions. So when you let go of that, when you allow them to have their own opinion, which they already do, you will have more energy to actually work towards the goals you want to have politically or personally.

Negative thoughts create anger, fear, anxiety, guilt, and shame. And those emotions create the desire to numb out and escape from your life. They don't motivate positive action. And again, I want to be really clear. When I say negative thoughts, I don't mean we all just have to pretend everything's great and look focus on the positive, right? I'm not saying let's pretend that sexism doesn't exist, let's pretend it doesn't have real world impacts.

That's not what I'm saying at all. When I talk about negative thoughts in this context, what I mean is spinning in your brain around your judgment of other people for not agreeing with you or resisting the fact that other people have a different opinion or believing that they're wrong or should change, all of that keeps you focused on their opinion.

As opposed to what do you want to do. What do you want to create? What do you want to bring to the world? What do you want to contribute? You let them have their sexist thoughts. They already have them, you can't do

UFYB31: What About Sexism?

anything about that, you can't control them. It's very kind of popular these days to think that just yelling at people that their thoughts are unacceptable is somehow going to make a difference. But it really doesn't.

So you allow other people to think the way they think. You can't do anything about it anyway. But you take all that energy you're spending resisting it and you focus on what you want to create, what kind of change you want to produce, that is such a better use of your energy.

So one last important point on this topic. The most insidious thing about oppression is the way it gets inside of our heads and makes us doubt ourselves. So when I suggest that women switch their mental and emotional energy from being angry about sexism to their own self-development, I sometimes get accused of telling them that they just should only care about themselves. Be narcissistic and self-involved.

But learning how to manage your own mind and be in charge of your own emotions is fucking revolutionary, you guys. It's the secret to your own liberation. It's how you deprogram your brain from all of the patriarchal bullshit that society has been teaching you for your whole life. What could be more liberational than taking back your own brain, your own feelings, your own experience of the world?

If you manage your mind to feel powerful, no one else can make you feel disempowered no matter what happens. When you feel cowed or disempowered or hopeless because of your thoughts about sexism, who wins? It's not you. You ain't the winner in that scenario.

Systems of oppression work because people internalize the beliefs and start living them out in their lives. They work in two-folds. They're obviously people who have more power take action, they make life more difficult for people with less power, but also the people with less power internalize the beliefs and start producing results that are constant with them.

UFYB31: What About Sexism?

That's true of the people benefiting from oppression and true of the people suffering from it. Again, I'll be really clear about what I'm not saying. I am not talking about victim blaming, I am not saying that sexism doesn't exist, or that you attracted sexism with your thoughts. That is not what I'm saying.

What I am saying is that all you can control is your own mind, and that learning how to think and feel on purpose and conserve your emotional and mental energy for the things you care about and what you want to do in the world is an act of creating your own liberation. When you have internalized sexist beliefs, when you believe that you're not good enough and you spend a lot of energy worrying about what other people think of you and if you're attractive enough and do men like you and all the things patriarchy tells women to think about, you replicate and produce more of patriarchy in the world.

When you manage your own mind, when you take back your power, which you can only do mentally and emotionally - people think taking back your power means yelling at other people not to have their thoughts. That's not what it means. It's not effective. Yelling at other people to have different thoughts is not effective. If that's how I tried to coach people, I would be broke and living on the street and it wouldn't work.

When you take responsibility for your own mind, when you learn to manage your mind, that is when you are completely powerful. That is when you can create a different reality with your feelings and actions and results. And when you do that, you free up so much more energy to give back.

I could never have been a coach when I was angry at the world. I was so outraged and exhausted and I was burnt out. I had nothing left to give other people in my life, much less people outside of my life. And now I create so much more in the world and I help so many more people than I ever did before.

UFYB31: What About Sexism?

All of that energy I used to spend resisting and hating I spend generating creativity and change. I still vote my values, I still donate to progressive groups, I still march in the streets, I still take a lot of the same actions I used to take. But I do it from such a different place and such a different energy now.

I am not less committed to equality and progress since I stopped judging people with different opinions from me. I do work that I think makes a bigger impact now because I'm operating from a place of love and compassion and a vision of a future that I want to see, rather than from a place of judgment and resistance.

Guilt and shame never produce positive change, whether you're applying them to yourself or you're imposing them on someone else. I'm not saying that women have a moral obligation or other kind of obligation to educate men or other women. We always get to choose how to spend our mental and emotional energy. But I can tell you that humans do not respond positively to hatred, guilt, and shame.

When you shame and judge someone else, you may produce sort of surface level compliance with the norms that you're enforcing on them, but you don't actually change their thoughts. The same is true for yourself. When you try to shame and judge yourself to act a certain way, sometimes you're successful at eliciting the actions, but it doesn't change your thoughts. It doesn't create lasting progress.

And again, I'm a coach and I chose that job and no one has an obligation to educate or coach anyone they don't want to. I am not saying that they do. What I am saying is that when you stop resisting other people being the way they are, compassion is not tiring, it's not exhausting. It's actually easy. It's the most natural thing in the world because you're not emotionally wrapped up in what they think or trying to make them think any one thing in particular.

UFYB31: What About Sexism?

And the truth is when you stop judging other people as much and then you stop judging yourself as much, you actually become way better at understanding your own internalized biases. Because you are not producing shame and you can be more open to learning.

The more compassion you have for yourself, the more you have for other people, and vice versa. Learning to manage your mind is the most personally revolutionary thing you can do. And it will leave you with way more energy for the revolution outside of you as well. Our liberation is bound up with each other and so is our love for our self and our love for others.

So out of your love for other women who need this message, I want to ask you guys a favor this week. I would love if you would share the podcast with one other woman who you think needs to hear it. That's how we get the word out about how to liberate yourself. That's how we help other women to take their own power back and learn to create the lives that they want.

So you don't have to share it with everyone you know, though it's great if you do. If you want to post about it on Facebook that's awesome, bonus points, but I would just love if you share it with one woman you know who you think would benefit and just imagine what she might learn and what good that might do for her.

Alright my chickens, liberate yourselves, liberate each other, love yourselves, love each other. 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.