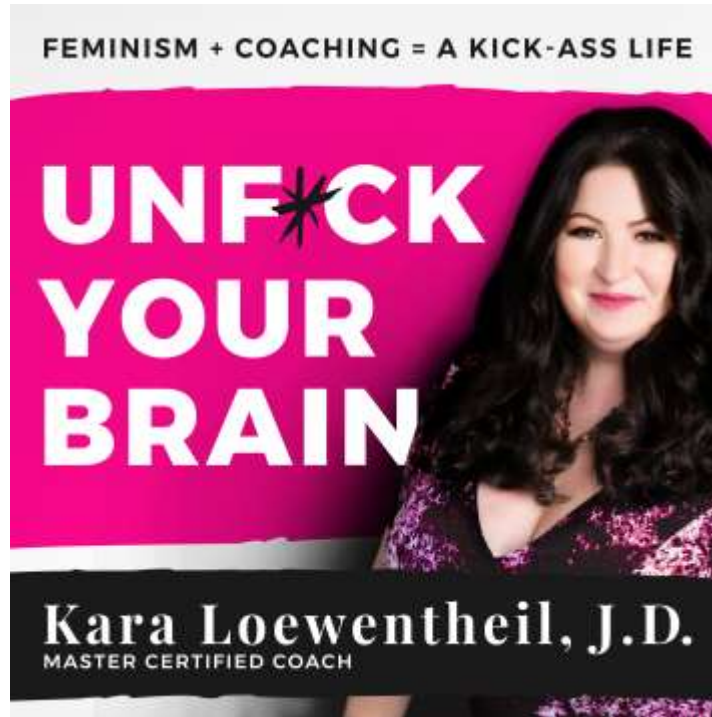


UFYB 50: People-Pleasing 2.0



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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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 is the flock today? I am excited because it is finally fall in New York and I love this season because it's sunny, it's not hot, and the air is crisp and I can survive in my apartment without air conditioning, so life is good.

I just spent today going through a big batch of applications for *Unf*ck Your Brain*, which is, for those of you who are new around here, it's not just the name of the podcast, it's also my coaching program. And one of the things I noticed while I was reading the applications was how many of the women identify themselves as people-pleasers.

And I find that most of my clients share this trait, and so today, I want to teach you more in-depth about people-pleasing. I have taught about people-pleasing on the podcast before. It was almost a year ago, so some of you probably have never gone that far back. And for those of you who have, there is always space to take the work deeper.

And one of the changes that I have made, or developments in the way that I teach this concept, is that I don't even like calling it people-pleasing anymore, because I think that term kind of perpetuates this delusion that, number one, we can please other people, and number two, that this behavior has anything to do with other people, which it really doesn't.

Calling ourselves people-pleasers makes it sound like we just really care about other people being happy. It almost validates that this makes us kind of a good or nice person. And it sounds so lovely, but it's such a destructive habit. So I don't even want to call it that anymore. I don't want to call it

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people-pleasing because I think it just becomes this sort of identity and it almost sounds like it makes us just a really sensitive kind person.

So instead, I want to call it people-deceiving because people-pleasing is your attempt to trick people, to deceive them, into liking you by smothering your authentic self and performing as whatever person your brain projects that want you to be.

So it's not people-pleasing for two reasons. Number one, you don't control other people's thoughts or feelings, even if they think you do. I'm going to go into this more in-depth in this episode. Even if they think that you do, you don't. They're just literally wrong. Their thoughts create their feelings. And just because they don't know that their thoughts create their feelings, doesn't mean you are creating their feelings or have any impact on their feelings.

Number two, it's not actually about pleasing them at all. It's about you trying to allay your own anxiety by trying to manipulate them rather than manage your own mind. And I know we think manipulate is a bad word, but that's what you're doing. You're trying to act a certain way to get them to think or feel a certain way.

And usually when we do this, we're lying. We're being someone we aren't really or we're doing something we don't want to do, and that's lying. So let's break down each element of that in more depth.

So number one, you don't control other people's feelings. Our thoughts cause our feelings. Other people's thoughts cause their feelings. A lot of the time when we are people-pleasing, the other person hasn't even said anything to us about what they want. We are literally making the whole thing up in our brains, projecting our own thoughts of inadequacy and anxiety onto them, and then responding to that projection. We're playing both roles in the drama, and they have no idea that any of that is going on.

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But, occasionally someone will tell you that you doing or not doing or saying or not saying something would change their feelings. So here's the distinction that is so important to make; someone else can think that you cause their feelings, but they are wrong.

Now, I'm going to prove this to you. Think about someone you spend a lot of time trying to please. Does it actually work most of the time? Really think about it; is that person blissfully happy because you've done whatever they want? Most likely, they are not. Most likely, it's a constant battle of trying to please them over and over and they are never all that pleased for too long.

And that's because their thought patterns cause their feelings. So even if you momentarily distract them from their own thought pattern by doing what they want, their brain will go right back to it. It's like a rubber band, stretched out, snaps back.

Let's take an example. Let's say your grandma really wants you and your sibling to come home for Thanksgiving and she says that having you both there will make her happy. So you agree to go, but your sibling doesn't. And you're going because you want to make her happy. But she's only happy for 30 seconds, because as soon as your arrival is over, her brain is going to go right back to thinking about how your other sibling isn't there.

Or let's say you have a friend who says she'll be happy if you hang out for her birthday doing something you don't want to do. So you do it anyway and you pretend to have a good time, and the whole time, your friend is distracted because she's fretting over how her boyfriend didn't do what she wanted or some other friend bailed.

We can see this in ourselves. Think about how your brain works. When you want someone else to validate you to cause your feelings, it never really works. It doesn't stick. Sometimes, if you can get them to do what you want or say what you want, you get a small hit of dopamine, but then it wears off

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and you want more, right? This is what happens when we talk about using people as validation vending machines.

It doesn't really help because them doing something doesn't change your thought. We talk about that all the time on the podcast, other people don't cause your thoughts. So the same is true in reverse. You don't cause other people's thoughts or feelings, even when they think that you can, because you won't. You never will be able to. It doesn't change their thought patterns.

Whatever their brain's story is, whatever story they're looking for evidence of, they're going to find that no matter what you do. So you don't cause other people's feelings. But even maybe more importantly, even if you could cause their feelings, your people-deceiving isn't actually about them at all because, remember, you can't feel their feelings.

So when you think you are doing something to make them happy, it's actually only because of how you want to feel. Or more accurately, it's usually about how you don't want to feel. That's why the term people-pleasing is so, I think, misguided. Most of the time, we're not doing it because we feel happy when someone else is happy and we just want to make them happy.

We are actually doing it because when we think about not doing it, we feel anxious and guilty and we don't want to have those feelings. So we try to act our way out of them by doing what we think the other person wants, which again, sometimes they may have told us, but often, we've completely made up.

So I'm just going to say that again because it's so important. Most of the time, it's not even about trying to make the other person happy. What it's about is trying to get away from our own anxiety and guilt that we feel if we think about not doing the thing in question. We don't want to feel the way

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we feel when we think, “This person wants me to and I should, I’m a bad person if I don’t.”

Whatever thought it is we have about not doing the thing, we don’t want to feel the negative emotion that comes from that thought. So rather than change the thought, we try to act our way out of it by just doing the thing. Instead of taking responsibility for our own emotions, we believe our kind of lying brain that if the other person is happy, we’ll be happy.

But the truth is that the only reason doing what someone else wants changes our feelings is because it changes our thoughts. It changes our thought from, “They aren’t going to like me if I don’t do what I’m projecting they want me to...” to, “They will like me since I did what I’m projecting they want.”

It’s just our own thought changing, and that’s the true rub of people-deceiving, because the whole reason we’re doing it is to try to make other people like us. But the person they’re liking isn’t us, it’s our performance of a fake person who has different thoughts and feelings and preferences than we truly have.

Whether it’s work or friendship or dating or family, I think this is such a waste of energy. We want to feel accepted and liked so badly that we manufacture a pretend person. And then when someone likes that pretend person, we feel good about ourselves. But that pretend person isn’t really us and our reward is just a lifetime of fake interactions with that person, where we pretend to be someone else forever.

And that feels terrible, because in doing so, we are rejecting ourselves. We are throwing our real selves under the bus in order to try to get approval from someone else whose brain we can’t control and who isn’t even interacting with the real us.

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So I want to make an important distinction here; if you actually change your thought to want to do what the other person wants as a gift to them, that feels totally different. I don't think that's people-deceiving because you've changed your thought. You now do actually want to do it because you've changed your thought to believe that you do.

So that's not what people-deceiving is. People-deceiving is when you know you don't want to do it, you don't change your thought about that, you just change your thought about whether or not you're going to do it, even though you don't want to, or you're going to pretend to feel something you don't feel.

And the paradox is that the more you do this, the more desperate you get for outside validation. The more that you people-deceive, that you people-please, the more that you lie about who you are to try to get approval from other people, the more desperately you want their approval because every time you do it, you reinforce the belief that someone else's opinion about you matters more than your own opinion about you.

So people-deceiving actually becomes kind of addictive. And like any addiction, the problems compound the longer you do it and the high stops feeling as good. So if you want to stop people-deceiving, you have to get real with yourself. Step one, stop calling it people-pleasing and stop believing the lie that you can please other people or that it's even about them.

Step two, practice recognizing what thought and feeling you are wanting to have when you feel the urge to lie or do something you don't want to do to control someone else's thoughts. And number three, practice changing your own thoughts directly instead.

If you need a serious intervention, as a lot of us do – I certainly used to – the good news is that rehab exists and it is called Unf*ck Your Brain.

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Building that relationship with yourself is the core work that we do in the program, and I would love to teach you how. So you can check it all out at www.unfckyourbrain.com/program. Have a beautiful week. Don't lie to yourself or anyone else and I'll see 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.karloewentheil.com/podcastconfidence.