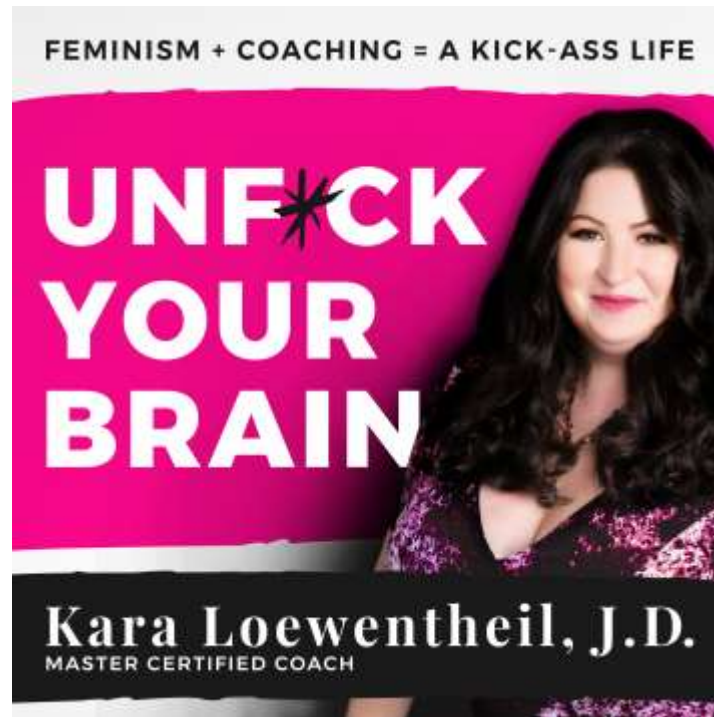


UFYB 54: Listener Q & A Vol. 6



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. It's time for more chicken questions. I keep thinking we're done, but then, of course, I get more questions. And I've heard from a lot of you about how helpful these are, so I'm just going to keep interspersing them as we go along.

Alright, let's dive in, "Hi Kara, I should say that I love your podcast. I've recommended it to several friends..." well thank you. I appreciate all of you who share the podcast love. Okay, here's the question, "I am four months postpartum and feel that your guidance on thought work has really helped me to feel balanced and level-headed, even despite having a major life change. Onto my question – I like to have an occasional glass of wine or two here and there and find it harder to manage my mind after drinking just a few glasses of wine. It's like I get tired and so does my brain, so it wants to go on autopilot. Is this common? I like to enjoy wine here and there, but I'm starting to think it's not worth it."

Yeah, I think that that's absolutely common. Of course, it's harder to manage our mind when we have put intoxicating substances into our body. Now, I don't have a position that it's good or bad; you just need to know that that's going to happen. And of course, some substances, depending on the amount, can cause a dopamine drop after. You get a dopamine flood with the substance, and then you get a drop, and then that can also make it challenging to manage your mind.

So you just have to decide if it's worth it to you. But absolutely, I do think that it is harder to manage your mind after you've been drinking. And so if you find yourself getting into specific problematic situations, like you get drunk and then you yell at your kids, or you pick a fight with your partner, or

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you shop for things you don't want, whatever it is, then you want to look at that and see, you know, is there a way to moderate it? Can you decide ahead of time what you're going to think and put it on a Post-it Note?

But for a lot of people, yeah, it's just not worth it. Why go to all that work to manage it when you could also just not drink? So I think that's totally normal, and of course.

Okay, "Hi Kara, I'm curious if you have any thoughts about mind over matter. I'm on day four of an annoying infection behind my wisdom tooth. I'm very sick and uncomfortable. I'm also in nursing school. I have a lot of things to get done, many of which can still happen from my bed, but I don't know how to manage my mind around these physical sensations and determine what's too much to expect of myself while being sick, versus what I can push through. Part of it is that I'm so incredibly frustrated being in pain so consistently for so many days, and that's something I can grasp, how to work on managing my mind, but I'm wondering if there's more I can do to help with the actual sickness physical side of things."

So pain has a lot to do with our thoughts about it, and it's a super interesting topic. I keep saying I'm going to do a podcast episode about it at some point. What I would do here is work through that frustration.

So you're frustrated because you think that you shouldn't be in pain; life would be better if you were not in pain. This is not cool; you don't want to feel this way. When you resist, pain is like an emotion in this sense, in the sense that when you resist it being there, it feels much worse.

So my approach is like, we've got to clean up all the thoughts about how it shouldn't be happening and it's getting in the way and it's ruining our life, and whatever else it is. You've got to get through all those thoughts. and then, when you're left with just the physical sensation of pain, if there is still some, you can break that down and try to process it like an emotion.

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So rather than, “I’m in so much pain...” which is a thought that causes a lot of emotion for people, you can think, “My jaw is bigger than normally. Swallowing makes my throat feel raw...” or whatever it is that’s happening. Really break down that physical sensation rather than having a kind of constant thought of this hurts or I’m in pain or my body’s broken, or whatever those thoughts are.

The other problem you’re having, I think, is that you can’t decide what to do or not do, and so you’re creating a lot of stress about that. And you have to decide for yourself, I choose to believe my body needs time to heal. And when I’m sick, I prefer to heal, and then catch up on work. I don’t really like to try to half work when I’m sick because it just feels like I half work, I half rest, everything takes twice as long and I’m not really giving my body the care that it needs.

And, since I’m personally not a brain surgeon, so it’s not like someone is going to die if I don’t operate on them on that day. And some of us are, but also, we have colleagues that could cover for us probably.

So it’s very rarely life and death when you think, “I have too much to do and I’m busy. I don’t want to get behind...” when you’re really afraid of is just your own stressful thoughts and feelings. It’s not really that there’s going to be a negative actual consequence. So I think that that is also something to work through.

Next question – I just love the variety of these, “Hi Kara, I’m a Chinese international student. I’m a freshman at a university. First, I want to thank you for everything you did to make this fabulous, fabulous podcast. Without *Unf*ck Your Brain*, I could not have ventured out of my comfort zone. Many of my friends love it too. My problem is that I am not recognized as a functional human being here on campus. I love this school and I did become friends with amazing people, but to say goodbye to the Mandarin-speaking bubble and to actually go out, left me powerless and socially

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awkward. No regret about that, but I hate having people think I cannot talk fast and witty and have them think I have the intelligence of a kindergarten kid. I sometimes feel neglected in group conversations. Except for my intimate friends, most Americans are not trying to overcome stereotypes or be patient, but I understand that no one has the responsibility to care or to help and I don't know if I'm victimizing myself or not. I just want to be confident and comfortable about myself. Any suggestions?"

So yeah, you're totally victimizing yourself because your thoughts cause your feelings. So what's so interesting about this note to me is that you say you had become friends with amazing people and that you have intimate friends who looked through the communication disconnect between you and have gotten to know you. And that at the same time, you are telling yourself that you are not recognized as a functional human being, and that's a thought you have about yourself.

That's not a circumstance; that's a thought. When you feel powerless or socially awkward, it's because of your thoughts. It's not because of other people and it's not because of the community, and you are projecting so much onto other people here. You're projecting that they don't think you're a functional human being, that they think you can't be witty, that they think you have the intelligence of a kindergarten kid.

You're projecting so many negative thoughts onto other people, and then you're responding to those. So your own thoughts are your only problem here, and if you want to feel confident, then you have to think thoughts that make you feel confident. Like, I would focus on the fact that you were super brave to come from another country to a place where it's not your native language and learn how to study there.

And I would focus on the fact that you have made good friends, so obviously you can communicate, Focus on those positive pieces of evidence that will build up your self-confidence, but also take responsibility

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for these feelings you have and don't project and blame them on everybody around you, because you really have no idea what they're thinking, and most people are not thinking about you nearly as much as you think. It's true for all of us.

Okay, I have another question about friendship, "Hi Kara, I recently started listening to your podcast. I've learned that many of the negative feelings I have are my own and not caused by others, but by my own thoughts." Okay, so sidebar, it's all of them, not just many of them. That's actually an important distinction.

Okay, so back to this question, "With that said, is there no truth in the power of influence? For example, I had a friend. I stopped spending time with her because I felt like she was constantly a negative-Nancy. She often put me down and accused me of wanting her ex-boyfriend. I took the verbal abuse for a while, but obviously, resentment grew. I attempted to talk about how I felt and that resolved the issue momentarily, but then she started making the same offhanded comments about me wanting her ex when clearly, I'm dating other people. I eventually stopped hanging out with her because I got tired of how she made me feel, or so I thought. Now my question is, if those feeling thoughts are my own, then how do I get back into a place of love for her when there's still resentment there? I'm not sure I even want to call her my friend anymore because I don't enjoy being put down and I think she's influencing my thoughts in a negative way; help."

Okay, so no, there is no truth in the power of influence if what you mean is other people cause my thoughts; 100% no. So she didn't cause your thoughts. You had negative thoughts about her. So she had her own negative thoughts, probably about herself. My guess is that she was worried about her boyfriend and whether he was faithful or the relationship was secure, and so she was seeing threats to that everywhere.

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But you took it personally. You say she accused you. You made an accusation, you call it verbal abuse, and then you stopped hanging out with her. So whatever feelings and thoughts you had came from your own thoughts; they didn't come from her.

Now, you may or may not want to be friends with her. It depends on – you might have a boundary about someone saying that you want to date their boyfriend or putting you down – I don't really know what that means in this context. We don't have specifics – but there's no exception to the idea that your thoughts create your feelings. They are not created by other people.

So you stopped spending time with her because, of course, you felt negatively about her, because your thoughts were, "She's verbally abusing me and she's a negative-Nancy." So you say, "How do I get back to a place of love when there's resentment there?" because you're reporting that to me like your resentment just exists and there's nothing you can do about it.

But your resentment is caused by your thoughts about her. So if you want to feel love for her, you have to look at those thoughts you have that are causing resentment and that's what you have to shift. The resentment isn't just like a dining-room table that just happens to be there.

It's not like, "How do I get across the room when there's this dining-room table in the way?" Your thoughts are creating that table. Your thoughts are creating the resentment. If you want to feel love instead of resentment, you've got to change your thoughts about her.

And to be really clear, you could love her and decide not to be friends with her. I don't know if I would be friends with somebody who, every conversation, they talked about how I was trying to steal her husband. I mean, probably not, just because I would eventually find that boring, and like, what's the point?

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But I could still love them. I could still feel love for the parts of them I did like and compassion that obviously they feel really insecure about their relationship, and just kind of not want to be around it because it seems boring to constantly be asked if I'm trying to steal someone's husband. That's just not what want all my friend conversations to be about. But I can totally do that from a place of love.

So you've got to take responsibility for your own resentment. It's not just there. She didn't cause it. It didn't just happen. Your thoughts caused it, so you need to shift those thoughts if you want to feel differently.

Okay, this is a perfect segue actually to this next question, "Hi Kara, I just finished my Peace Corps service, and I want to say thank you as your teachings absolutely helped me get through. One question I've been thinking of is, if your mind is managed and you're therefore emotionally unaffected by others, how do you decide on a relationship and when do you decide to leave? It's confusing for me, especially when considering your view on friendships as in just taking the positives from them."

So this is a beautiful question because this is how we all think. We think, "I want to be around people who make me happy, and if I stop feeling happy, then I leave..." because we think other people cause our feelings. But if you can be happy with anyone, how do you decide who to be with?

So there's two answers to that question. Number one is, you just decide, whoever you want; it's just not nearly as big a deal as you think. There are so many more people you could be happy with.

So when you clear out all of the, kind of, drama in your brain and you are taking responsibility for your own emotions, the result isn't that you have no preferences. I still don't really like okra. I could do some thought work about it, but just ultimately, I don't find it as delicious as avocado, let's say.

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That's still there, but I no longer tell myself that if I have to eat okra, I'll be miserable, and if okra's the only thing on the menu then it's a disaster and I have to have avocado to be happy. I think I'm hungry, I don't know why that's my example right now.

But really, the truth is that the stakes are way lower than you think when you take responsibility for your own emotions, so there's a lot of people, friendship or relationship-wise that you could enjoy. So it does really broaden the field, which I think is a good thing.

At the same time, you still will find that you have preferences or people you want to spend more time with or want to spend less time with, even knowing that all the people are amazing and you can love them all and you could be happy spending time with any of them. But you'll still find some that you just kind of want to be around even a little bit more, or you want to be around extra, a little more than all the other people.

So it's not the case that you end up not having any opinions or preferences, but it is the case that there's a much bigger, much wider, array and the decision about who to date or who to be friends with has much less import. It's just not as big a deal because you're going to take care of your own emotions, they don't have to deliver them.

Okay, next question, "Hi Kara, my mom and brother are Jewish and I'm not. They chose to convert because that's what made sense to them, but I chose another path. My mom can't seem to except that it's not the life I chose. I live up north in England and she lives in London, so I only visit her very rarely. It's mainly because I know that she's going to be the way she is, telling all her friends that I'm going to convert, going to find a Jewish man, and basically planning my whole life. This I don't mind as much because I know that only I have the power to plan my life. What I want to know is how do you deal with having a religious family, but knowing that your thoughts control your feelings, your feelings control your actions, and

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not a higher being. How do you do that but maintain respect for your family?”

I'm actually not even sure I understand the premise of this question, but you say that you don't mind the way she is, but it seems like you do mind. Or you think that in order to respect her, you have to go along with this. So I would just think of it – this is going to sound a little crazy, but stay with me.

So, for instance, patients who have Alzheimer's or dementia often are confused about what's going on or they think they're in the wrong time or whatever it is. And a lot of people, if they don't really think about it, will try to, like, argue with them. like, “No, it's not 1954, it is 2000 and that nurse is not your wife...” or whatever, right?

And I read this article once about kind of a holistic facility where people live who have Alzheimer's or have dementia and the staff just totally goes along with it. It's like there's no harm. They're not constantly contradicting them; they're just like, “Yes, it is so great that World War Two is over.”

So I am in no way saying that people who are religious have Alzheimer's or dementia; that's not the point at all. I don't want anyone to twist this. What I'm saying is, like, as far as you're concerned, it is like that. They believe a whole set of things that you just simply don't believe at all.

You think they have a shared delusion that you don't have and vice versa. They think, probably, you have a delusion that they don't have. So I think you can take that same approach. Like, you don't have to lie about what you're going to do, but there's no reason – your mom can think that that's going to happen and she can tell everybody. It makes her feel good, so what?

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You seem to think there's a conflict between you believing that there's not a higher being and them believing that there is one, but there doesn't have to be any conflict there. They believe what they believe, you believe what you believe. You can hang out with them. They're probably going to want to talk about what they believe and that's fine.

You can talk about what you believe or not, but I don't really even think that there's a conflict here. But you can respect them in the sense of not fighting them about their beliefs, but that doesn't mean that you need to have any conflict about it, basically. And in terms of you think respect, you mean, like how can you respect them if they don't share your beliefs or you think that their beliefs are dumb, that's thought work for you to do.

Like, I don't personally believe in a lot of religion's beliefs, most of them, but I don't think that means that those people are wrong or dumb or foolish or delusional or anything. I just think that we all have thoughts and they have different thoughts than I have, and that's fine.

Their thoughts work for them and my thoughts work for me, and really, who knows what's – in an ultimate sense – who knows what's true? I can report that in my experience, thoughts cause feelings, cause actions, but I can't prove to you that there's no divine being sparking my thoughts. I don't know. So it really doesn't matter. That doesn't have to impact my respect for anyone at all.

Okay, let's do one more. This is also a good one and kind of relates, "Hi Kara, longtime listener, first-time question asker. Since listening to your podcast, I've been able to manage my mind for the first time in forever. But now I'm not reacting, and especially to the things that used to immediately incense me. I've been labeled apathetic because I no longer find certain topics or debates enraging. I'm able to debate or question without inflaming and social media friends now find this to be uncharacteristic and apathetic; weird. What are your thoughts?"

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Well it is uncharacteristic, right? You used to get enraged and now you don't. This is really common and actually relates. I think in the last Q&A, I answered the question about not feeling so distraught by your friend's problems because you just see that they're thoughts, feelings, and actions going on.

It's the same thing. Other people will find it weird because we think it's normal to have an unmanaged mind. The society norm is to believe that external things cause your thoughts and you can't do anything about your feelings and being enraged is normal and a sign that you care.

So if that's the kind of thought that other people have, of course they're going to think that you're being apathetic. I just think, like, that's fine. That's a worthwhile price to me. I mean, I actually don't think I'm apathetic at all, but I can't control their thoughts.

Now, if somebody asks me about this, I, of course, explain what I teach you guys all the time, which is that managing my mind actually helps me make more change rather than less. But like, for sure, I manage my mind and create this podcast and teach all of you, rather than get into, like, yelling debates on Facebook about politics.

I think I'm doing more good this way, and that comes from managing my mind. So I think that what you're describing is normal and that happens. like, I also don't get as enraged as I used to and I'm sure some people think that that means that I don't care and I'm apathetic. I don't believe that.

I don't choose to believe that about myself, but I can't change their thoughts. That's fine if they want to think that. I just look at our results and I feel like they're yelling on Facebook and I'm creating. So I feel like it's working for me.

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Okay, that's it for today, my dears. 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.karloewentheil.com/podcastconfidence.