

# UFYB 60: Jealousy & Envy



**Kara Loewentheil**  
MASTER CONFIDENCE COACH

## 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 chickens. Now I laugh whenever I say that because a couple of you have messaged me, like, DMed me on Instagram or wherever else or tagged me and shown me that now you and your friends call each other chickens, which I just love. It's like we're spreading the flock, we're spreading the chicken love.

Alright, so I am super excited about today's topic because I have gotten a lot of requests from you all to do an episode about jealousy and envy. I think most of you call it jealousy, but I'm talking about them both today because they're related but kind of different.

It was super interesting preparing for this episode because once I stopped to think about it, I realized that I hadn't sort of done this topic yet because I no longer really even have jealous or envious thoughts. It like, doesn't occur to me. But when I think back on purpose and try to remember, I for sure used to have jealous and envious thoughts all the time.

And so figuring out what changed, what did I use to be jealous or envious of and why and why don't I have those emotions anymore was super fascinating, so I'm really excited to share all of that with you. And this is also perfect timing because one of the things that women are socialized to have a lot of envy and jealousy about, like one of the things that we are taught to feel jealous about is other women's bodies and appearances.

And that totally makes sense because number one, we're socialized to think that our greatest value lies in our appearance, and number two, that we need to look a certain way to get love and acceptance and happiness,

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and that those are the same thing. Like, women are taught that love and acceptance is happiness, which isn't necessarily what men are taught.

And then number three, we're taught to believe that women are in competition with each other for male attention. So if your appearance is your greatest value and you need to look a certain way to get love, and that's what will make you happy and there's not enough to go around and you've got to compete with other women to get it, how could you not be fixated on comparing yourself to other women and how they look?

This is like, the biggest mind fuck of patriarchy is that it teaches us to think this way and then it's like, women who care about how they look are so shallow. Or like, if they compete over men or you try to steal another woman's man you're like, disloyal or you're a - all of this teaches us exactly to think this way and then teaches us to judge ourselves and other women for thinking this way. That is the mind fuck.

So I'm going to talk about jealousy and envy in this podcast but I also wanted to let you know that I am teaching this class on body image in January and it's now open for registration. I talked about this a little bit in last week's podcast. It's a two-hour master class, it's called UnF\*ck Your Body Image master class, and this is another topic that you all have been kind of clambering for more content on.

It's so much bigger than I can teach in just a podcast episode, but I know people need help with it who aren't necessarily going to work with me in my six-month program. So I'm offering this master class, January 6th and it's a great way to take the work deeper. You're going to learn some really concrete practices and tools that you can use to stop hating how you look.

Like, let's be real. To stop avoiding how you look in mirrors or scrutinizing how you look in mirrors and to stop having your whole day determined by whether your brain says you look thin or fat in the morning, like, how many

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days have been "ruined" before they start because you look in the mirror and you don't like what you see.

And I just - that is not okay with me. I mean, you are okay with me. I love you and I understand why your brain is like that. It's not okay with me that so many women are living their lives like that. It's not okay with me that we're spending like, all of our brain power worrying about this shit. So this is a way to learn some really concrete practices and tools you can use.

I did so much deep work on this on myself. I really believe that what I have developed is the best, most comprehensive, and most effective body image coaching tools that exist out there. I don't believe that anyone has done more work on this than I have and has more radically effective tools. Body image work is hard work. I am not telling you that if you come to this two-hour class your body image will be totally solved by the end.

That would be some bullshit and I do not sell snake oil. But what I am going to tell you is that if you practice what I teach in this class and you really pay attention and you do the work, it's going to change your fucking life. So you should probably come do it. It's [www.unfckyourbrain.com/bodyimageclass](http://www.unfckyourbrain.com/bodyimageclass), or you can just go to [www.unfckyourbrain.com/60](http://www.unfckyourbrain.com/60). That's the show notes for this podcast episode, there will be a link there.

The class is January 6th so you have a little time but I wouldn't delay too long because I have to cap it at some point. I'm actually not sure what the cap number is, it has to do with the webinar software, and this is being also announced on another podcast that has like, millions of downloads a month. So I don't want you guys to miss out because you're my chickens, so hurry up.

Okay, so - and I'll remind you at the end because you're all going to be like, "Yes, I want to do it," and then you're going to forget about it while you get your mind blown with this episode. Okay, so let's get started. Jealousy and

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envy. So first of all, when I started writing about this and researching it, I was like, wait a minute, are those the same thing? How are those different?

Because I think we all talk about them like they're the same, and for me, I definitely used to use the word jealousy to kind of mean anything in the general ballpark of the kind of feelings that I was talking about, but they're not the same thing. So here's what they have in common; they are emotions. So jealousy and envy are both thoughts.

I'm sorry, you know, thoughts, feelings, whatever. No, jealousy and envy are both emotions. They are both feelings. Now, they could be a thought. I shouldn't like, make too much fun of myself. If you think to yourself, "I'm so jealous of her, she's so thin," that is a thought and you've got the word jealous in your thought. But jealousy and envy in terms of when you feel that way, when you feel jealous, when you feel envious, those are emotions. They're feelings.

They are created by your thoughts and they are actually different. So when I looked this up, I thought the distinction was super interesting. Jealousy is when you fear that someone else is going to take away something you already have. And to me, jealousy feels like anxiety. It's like, I have this thing and someone might take it away from me, and now I'm anxious about what the threats are.

Envy is when you want something someone else has. So with jealousy it's like you have it, but you're worried it might get taken away from you. Envy, you don't have it, someone else has it, or some people in a general sense have it and you want it. And to me, I had to really think back like, what does envy feel like.

I think envy feels more like sadness. Like, envy to me has this sinking feeling whereas jealousy is anxious like I have this thing and I don't want it taken away. Envy is like, I want this thing that I don't have. It's like, the

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emphasis is on I don't have that. And to me, there's a sinking and a resignation, and I think it's the closest thing I can think of is that it feels a little bit like sadness.

So this is kind of a side note for people who want to geek out about feelings but I call - jealousy and envy belong to what I would call kind of language emotions. So here's what I mean by that; our bodies register emotion but I think that there are a couple of kind of broad buckets, and there are people - those of you who are my clients have heard me talk about this a lot - like, there are different anthropological theories about how many feelings there are basically, and what are the universal feelings that all cultures share.

The way that I think about this is that there's kind of five main buckets, which is fear, happiness, anger, shame, and sadness. So I think those are the big buckets. Any feeling we have is kind of a derivation of one of those. But then there are nuances in those, like anxiety is a lighter version of fear.

So something like jealousy or envy, I don't think there's a separate set of sensations in the body that are only for jealousy or only for envy. So that's why I say I think jealousy is a version of anxiety, when we are thinking a thought that creates jealousy, what we feel in our body is a form of anxiety. And when we are thinking a thought that hinges on envy, when we want something we don't have, I think we feel sad or kind of resigned or sort of depressed. All different variations of sad.

So that's why I call it kind of like a descriptive emotion or a language emotion. It's like, there's a word in English that names it as a feeling. It's definitely a feeling, but it's sort of a word we use to describe a version of a general feeling based on the kind of thought that gives rise to it.

So like, we use jealousy to describe the kind of anxiety that is created when you think about someone maybe taking something away that you have and your jealousy of them. And envy is a version of the feeling of sadness that's

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created in your body when you think specifically about wanting something you don't have that someone else has that you want.

So that's my little academic digression for those of you who are super into thought work and if that didn't make sense to you or seem boring, that's fine, just ignore it. It's not crucial at all. That is just a little treat for the thought workers out there like me who get super into like, what is a feeling and how do we know which it is.

So let's recap. Back to the main cocktail party conversation that's not just for the feeling nerds. Jealousy is when you have something but you think someone else can take it from you and you're jealous of that thing that might get it from you, and envy is when someone else has something that you want.

In general though, I think idiomatically speaking, the way we actually just use spoken English today, I think people tend to use those words fairly interchangeably. And in this podcast, I'm going to sometimes distinguish between them and sometimes talk about them together because ultimately they both work the same way.

Even though one of them is more anxiety, that's jealousy, and one of them is more sadness, that's envy, at least for me - and your physical experience could be different. That's how I experience them. They have something important in common, and this is the thing I really want you to think about. What they have in common is the belief that you need the thing or person or experience that you're thinking about to be happy.

So it could be that you have something or someone and you fear losing them, or it, or could be that you don't have it and you think you need it. But either way, the reason that jealousy and envy come up is that you are believing that you will be or are happier with the thing or the person or the experience than you would be or are without it.

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So if it's jealousy, you are believing I need this thing to be happy and if it gets taken away from me, I'm going to be less happy. So I need to be looking for danger and jealous of anyone who might take it away from me. And when it's envy, you're thinking, they have that thing and I want it. If I had it, I'd be happier.

And that probably seems obvious and true to you that there are things that you'd be less happy if someone took away and more happy if you had, but remember what the core of all thought work is. Your thoughts create your feelings. So what you have or who you're with or what you own or where you live, none of that creates your feelings.

There are people living right now in what you would consider appalling conditions, who are happier than you are. And there are people who have everything that you could ever imagine wanting in life who are miserable, and vice versa. In any income level, in any life condition, there are people having different experiences because their thoughts are different.

So when you feel jealous, it's because you have something that you think you need to be happy, and you think there's not enough of it to go around. If someone gets yours, you're going to be unhappy. And more than that, you believe your grip on it is tenuous because you think about it, you're not jealous. Like, if someone admires or says they wish they had your hair, you're not jealous. That doesn't upset you.

You're not like, oh my god, what if they get my hair? You don't think they can take it away from you. You know that your hair is yours. Even if they were like, "I love your hair, I'm going to do whatever I can to get your hair," you wouldn't be worried because you know it grows out of your head and no one can take it away from you.

But if someone admires or wants your partner or your job or your friend, you may feel jealous, and if you do, it's because you not only think that you



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need it to feel okay, but you think that they can take it away from you. Now, for instance, if someone wants my job, I am not worried because I know it's mine. I created this job, I do it the way I do it because of exactly who I am.

Even if someone impersonated me, they wouldn't be able to do this the way I do it. So no one can take that away from me. But if someone says they want your boyfriend or your girlfriend and you feel anxious and jealous, it's because you think they have the potential to take your partner away from you.

So I get so many podcast questions about jealousy and they are mostly - they're almost all written by women and they're about having partners who are women or men, somebody of any gender identity, but the same theme in all of them is like, I have this partner, x, y, z happened that he was texting or she was texting or I saw this woman hit on him or her, whatever it is, and now I'm so jealous and I can't stop feeling jealous and worrying about where he is and feeling jealous if anyone spends time with, and all of that.

The reason that all those thoughts is coming up is because you are believing I need my partner to be happy and this person has the potential to take them away from me. So that's why you feel jealous. You have something but you're afraid of losing it, and that's why it feels so anxiety-producing.

And of course, most of the time, no one has said anything about wanting to take away what you have. Most of the time, no one has expressed any desire to do that. But you still feel jealous because of your thoughts that they might. And this is where jealousy connects to self-confidence and worthiness, which is so interesting.

Because jealousy isn't just about believing that you need something or someone to feel happy. It's also about believing that someone else can

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take it away and believing that the reason someone could take it away is because you aren't good enough to keep it. And I think this is why jealousy makes people feel so insane.

If you've ever been gripped by irrational jealousy, you know it feels like you are possessed. This is why otherwise normal boundary respecting honest people end up four layers deep in their partner's email in the middle of the night, and it's like they've come to and they don't understand how they got there. It's like a drinking binge.

It feels so unmanageable, and I think this is why. I think there's three levels of unmanaged mind going on that are making you crazy. So number one, you're believing that you need something external to feel okay, often that you need your partner. People do have jealousy stuff about work or money or whatever else, but I'm just going to keep - I think a lot of us experience this in the context of romantic relationships, but also friendships. A lot of us have had a lot of jealousy of a good friend making another new friend.

So let's just say relationships in general, but you're believing you need something external to feel okay, so you need that partner, you need that friend, you need them to act a certain way. You're also believing you can't guarantee keeping it, so like, of course this completely activates your lizard brain. You're like, "Oh, I need this thing, I'll feel like I'm going to die if I don't have it, and also, I can't guarantee that I can have it."

There's a recipe for your lizard brain to like, put on its hard hat and pull all the alarms and run around screaming. Just what's happening. And then on top of that, you are believing that if someone else gets the thing away from you, the person, the time, it will mean they're better than you.

So of course, people get crazed by jealousy. It's just like the trifecta of the kind of thoughts that make you feel insane. I need this thing to be okay, I can't guarantee if I can keep it, there's danger, someone's going to take it

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from me, and if they take it from me, it's because I wasn't good enough. That is just crazy-making in a nutshell.

And this is why jealousy actually has no relation to whether someone else wants something you have or you might lose it. A lot of the time, nobody else wants what you have. Not that your partner isn't great, but nobody's actually trying to get them. It's because it's really about your thoughts about yourself and your ability to create your own emotions and to manage your own mind.

If you believe that you need something external to feel okay about yourself, and that if someone else is better than you, that they can take it away from you, then you are constantly going to be hyper-vigilant and anxious about any possible threats. So an underling at work who seems smart and competent, you're going to be jealous of any recognition they get because you think it means they're going to take your job away from you and then you're going to feel like a failure.

Or an attractive person who flirts with your partner or just like, exists in their space, same thing. So when you think about it, do you think that confident people feel jealous very often? And I think no, because they don't doubt that they deserve what they have and that they can keep it.

Now, like, being confident in that way, it doesn't save you from the other problem. If you're confident but you believe that you need something or someone to be happy, you will probably still feel anxious about losing it, but your anxiety's not going to turn in the direction of jealousy. You're going to focus your anxiety on something else like the person getting hit by a car or something.

It doesn't necessarily mean you're not going to be anxious, but it's not going to be jealousy. I think that jealousy has to do with this belief that someone can take something away from us in a way that has to do with

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them being better than us. It won't feel as intense as jealousy because it's lacking the additional layer of attaching your self-worth to keeping the thing.

So that's jealousy. So what about envy? I think envy is kind of the simpler cousin of the two because envy just means you want something that someone else has that you don't. And why do we want something we don't have? All together chickens, cluck in unison. Because of how we think it will make us feel.

When we want something we don't have, it's because our brain predicts that we will feel better when we have it. And that means really what it is is a prediction about what we will think if we have it. So stay with me. Thoughts create feelings. So if you're single and you're envious of women who have a romantic partner, it's because your brain predicts that you would be happy if you had one.

But why will you really be happy if you are? It won't be because of the partner. It'll be because of your thoughts. Right now, your thought about not having a partner is something like, "There's something wrong with me, I'm unlovable." So your brain thinks getting a partner would feel amazing because it would prove there isn't something wrong with you.

But that's actually what your brain's predicting, is that it would get to think, "Oh, I'm lovable." It's just that thought it wants to have and your brain thinks that external circumstances cause your thoughts. So your brain is like, well, if we want to think we're lovable, we have to get a boyfriend and that's what will let us think that. But that's not how it works.

You're already lovable, there already isn't something wrong with you. It's just a thought. And by the way, it's a total lie. So your brain always tells you if you just get this thing I'm going to let you feel good about yourself. But no, that's not how it works. If you currently believe something is wrong with

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you, changing your external circumstance won't change that. Your brain will totally keep thinking it. It's just lying when it says that it won't.

So when we're envious, we think that if we had what someone else has, we would be happier. And it does relate to self-confidence a little in the sense that often, the reason we want the thing is that we predict then we could think that we're good enough. So enviousness can be intense, I don't think it's as - it doesn't feel as out of control as jealousy does, in my experience. But it can be like - it can totally relate to self-confidence in that way and it can be very preoccupying for sure.

One of the reasons that I really love teaching my coaching program the way I do and one of the reasons I teach in a group is that there are women in all life situations in it. So there are women in it who are single and who are so envious of their married friends, and they're convinced that being married would make them happy. And then there are women in it who are married and are not happy.

And they might be perfectly happy in their marriage, it doesn't mean they have a bad marriage, but it has not solved all their problems and made them feel inherently worthy and lovable. They just are looking for some other thing to do that. And most of them thought that about getting married, then they got married, didn't solve the problem and then they're like, looking for the next thing.

Or there are women in the group who are so envious of people who have a lot of money and they think, "If I were rich, then I would feel amazing. I would feel good enough, I would feel safe, I would feel secure." Then there are women in the program who have more money than the first woman has ever dreamed of, and they think they need more or they think they need a partner or whatever it is.

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And when you think about it, of course. There are thin, rich, married, successful people all over the place who are fucking miserable. If you know any of them, you will know that. But our brains tell us that if we just had what they had, we'd be happy. Even though there's so much evidence to the contrary all around us.

And I've talked about this on the podcast before but when I was thinking about envy, one of the things that really came to mind was one of the ways that I cured my envy of thin, conventionally beautiful women when I was doing body image work. I walked around Manhattan for a whole summer thinking, every time I saw a conventionally thin, attractive woman, which it's Manhattan so that was like 600 times a block, I would think, "All beings suffer."

Especially if she was with like a conventionally handsome man because my brain was like, that is it. That's the dream. If you are 5'10 and a size four and your boyfriend looks like he came out of a J Crew catalogue, you would have no problems, your whole life would be happy. But of course that's not true. If you know any one - whatever your thing is.

So your thing might not be appearance, it might be money or profession or they have the family you always wanted, whatever it is, but if you think about it, you almost always know someone who has the thing you think you want who is not happy. And so I was constantly practicing thinking, "All beings suffer," to drill that in.

And you know, that's a very like, it's a Buddhist meditation, it also kind of fits with the whole Jewish approach to things, so sometimes I teach it as even Beyoncé gets cheated on. The point is - a little more pop culture. But the point is that nothing in the world will protect you from negative emotion or make you happy forever.

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But that's what envy is. We think, "If I had that thing, then I wouldn't feel bad." Negative emotion is a part of life, and both positive and negative emotion are caused by your thoughts. It's not your job, it's not your partner, it's not your money, it's not your complexion, it's not your friends, it's not your style.

Nothing you covet that someone else has, nothing you feel envious about creates their feelings or will create your feelings. You only want it because you think it will make you happy, but happiness is available to you now. And the deepest irony of this whole thing is that the only reason you're unhappy is that you are thinking you need the thing.

There's nothing wrong with being single and being single doesn't actually cause negative feelings. What causes negative feelings is thinking, "I shouldn't be single, if I had a partner I'd be happy." So we cause the dissatisfaction with that thought and then we're like, well, the only way to solve this problem is to go get the partner.

We believe the propaganda causes the dissatisfaction and then we believe the propaganda, and then we try to act on it to solve the dissatisfaction. You guys following me? The only reason you feel bad is your thought that you need that thing to feel good. If you didn't have the thought that you needed that thing, you wouldn't have a problem. If you stopped thinking you needed the thing you were envious of, then you wouldn't be dissatisfied. There'd be nothing to cure, there would be no problem. You wouldn't want the thing.

Your current thoughts are what are causing your unhappiness. If you change your thoughts, that's what will solve your problem. It's the only thing that will solve your problem. So we are going to talk more about this and how it relates to body image in the Body Image master class for sure.

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So if you find yourself kind of constantly comparing yourself to how other women look, if you're always scanning a room when you walk in to see if someone else in it is bigger than you or smaller than you or has better skin or worse skin than you, whatever your body preoccupation is, you need to come sign up for the class.

I'm going to really go more in depth on how we are taught to link up our appearance to our happiness, we're going to learn how to rewire our brains, so like yes, so we can love our bodies. I think that's an important goal and I want every woman to feel beautiful and sexy and at home in her body, but also so we can stop fucking thinking about it.

Stop thinking about food and exercise and the size of our thighs like, every five minutes. Because we all, you and me and all of us, all of us chickens have way more important work to do in the world. And one of the ways that patriarchy keeps us down and wins is that it keeps women starving. Like, literally sometimes, and spending all their brain power on counting calories instead of changing the world.

And I just cannot let that stand. So [www.unfckyourbrain.com/bodyimageclass](http://www.unfckyourbrain.com/bodyimageclass). Just go to [www.unfckyourbrain.com/60](http://www.unfckyourbrain.com/60), it's the podcast show notes and there'll be a link there. I can't wait to see you there.

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