

UFYB 80: Judgment V. Curiosity



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 are you all? The weather here in New York is glorious, so, of course, I'm about to get on a plane and head out of town. It actually is a little-known fact about me, I have a psychic ability to subconsciously predict the one week per season that the weather will be perfect here and then I book a trip out of town several months ahead of time.

So, I'm going to San Francisco to see some good friends, celebrate my birthday, then I'll be going to Dallas to teach some of my coach students and meet with my brilliant mastermind, and I'm just super excited for this trip, even though I leave for the airport in like an hour and I'm not done packing. That's just how I roll. And also, there's a dog on the street that's barking a lot and you might hear it because I can't wait and record this another time.

Alright, so, we have no time to waste. I've got to pack. Let's get down to it. Some weeks, this is just how it rolls. So I think that we basically have two modes of interacting with the world and that's what I want to talk to you about. And that includes other people, things that happen to us, even ourselves and our own brains.

And those two ways are curiosity and judgment. So most of us spend I think about 95% of our time in judgment and about five percent of our time in curiosity. And I think the goal of thought work is to flip that proportion. Now, for all my lawyers and engineers trying to calculate the exact numbers right now, those are not scientific percentages.

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I'm just saying, we spend a lot of time judging and not a lot of time being curious and I think we want to try and readjust that. So by judgment, I mean evaluating something and deciding whether it's good or bad, like if you like it or you don't like it or what you think about it. Essentially, I just mean having an opinion about it.

And judgment is sneaky because sometimes it sounds very loud and judgy, and so we know that. But often, it's really quiet. Like, sometimes it sounds like a preference or an opinion. Or, most sneakily, it just sounds like you're stating facts to yourself. Like your brain just tells you that it's reporting the news, even though it's actually judging and evaluating and having an opinion about everything it's telling you.

I always joke that I come from a family of Jewish lawyers, and so until I discovered coaching, I didn't even know that not having an opinion about something was like an option. I thought you had to have an opinion about everything. If you start to listen to the conversations around you and your own brain, you will see how often you are evaluating and judging and having an opinion, whether you like someone's clothes or whether you sounded smart or dumb in the meeting, what your siblings should do about their spouse, how your parents should behave, what's wrong with people who walk too slow? That's a New York favorite.

It's so fascinating also to look at Facebook profiles or online dating profiles and see how often we are defining ourselves by contrast to what we don't like; so many evaluations and judgments and opinions. I think our brain loves to be judgy for two reasons. Number one, your brain loves shortcuts.

I have talked about heuristics on the podcast before. Your brain doesn't want to spend the energy deciding everything new every minute. So it just has some go-tos, like I love flowers and I hate cargo pants, whatever. And then, every time it encounters something it identifies as a flower, it's like, "Great, I like that thing." And every time it sees something that goes in the

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category of cargo pants, it's like, "Ew, bad, I hate it." It likes to put a little check mark. It's like, categorized, done, next stimuli for me to categorize.

And I think the second reason our brains really like judgment is that judgment sort of serves to reinforce our own identities. When we share our judgments with other people out loud, it can bond us if we share the same judgments.

Now, we know about thought work, we know it only bonds us because our thought is we have the same opinions about things, and then we feel close to them. You don't actually have to judge to bond. It's just our thought, but so many of us use this as a strategy.

I'll actually always remember, when I discovered thought work, telling someone I knew about the idea that your thoughts cause your feelings and what you think about people, and she said, "But if you like everyone, how would you know who to be friends with?" That's where her brain went because her idea of how to connect with people was so based on judging some people as positive, that you'd want to be friends with, and some people as negative that you'd want to reject.

And even in your own head, you use your opinions and judgment to bond with others like you who you're imagining. They stand for the kind of person you are and you're a little audience of one for your own judgment. The problem with judging everything and evaluating it and having opinions about it is that you can't shut that off inside your own brain.

So it means you are always judging yourself too. You're always evaluating or having opinions about what is good and bad about you. And if you're one of my listeners, like 90% of the reports are about what's bad with you, I'm going to guess, what's wrong with you.

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And you even judge your own thoughts. I'm seeing this – of course, I already knew this – from my students, but seeing this in The Clutch is amazing because there's so many people in there and a whole bunch of new people are starting each week's work at the same time. So every week, there's a whole bunch of posts about the first week's curriculum and then the second week's curriculum.

And so I'm seeing, just in real time, how many people have so much judgment about their own thoughts. Again, not a surprise, I do this with my clients, but it's just like seeing it in the aggregate is so incredible. So it's so powerful to see how much that's holding us back.

So, let me give you an example what I mean about that. You have a thought that you don't want to hang out with your grandmother, and then you immediately think, "I'm a terrible person for having that thought," right? When we say, "Oh I feel guilty because I don't want to hang out with my grandma," what we mean is, "I feel guilty because I have the thought, I'm a bad person for not wanting to hang out with my grandma," or, "I'm a bad person for having that thought about my grandma."

But you judge and evaluate the sentences in your own mind and you make them mean something about you. And that is a huge thought work block because it means you aren't willing to actually observe and be present with your thoughts, not just because they create physical sensations in your body you want to avoid – that's one reason we don't like to be present – but because you create additional suffering for yourself with your thoughts about your thoughts. That's the problem with judgment.

Judgment is like a muscle. If you use it on everything outside of yourself, you will also use it constantly on yourself. You will always be finding yourself and your thoughts wanting, which means you can't actually learn to observe your thoughts, which means you can't ever change them.

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It is impossible to change a thought that you are judging yourself for having. Let me say that again; if you are judging yourself or having a thought, you'll never be able to change it. It doesn't matter if you're judging it because you make it mean something about you or you're judging it because you think, "Well I know about thought work, I shouldn't have this thought anymore. Any judgment you're having about a thought will make it impossible to change it.

And I see this. I see my students want to do thought work instrumentally, meaning they're desperate to change a thought so they won't have an additional bad thought about themselves for having the first thought. So they want to hurry up and change the first thought to get away from the second thought about the thought. That doesn't work.

You have to clean up the thoughts where you're judging and shaming your own thoughts and yourself first. It's like, if we start from the ground up, we have a thought, then a thought about the thought, the clean-up has to start from the top down. We've got to clean up the thought about the thought and then we can clean up the thought. We can only clean from that top down.

Then you can change the underlying thoughts. So, what is the opposite of judgment? I think it's curiosity. Curiosity doesn't assume to know the answer. Curiosity doesn't evaluate if something is good or bad. Curiosity doesn't have an opinion. Curiosity pays attention.

If you're curious, you're interested. You're not evaluating; you're listening. You don't want to categorize; you want to learn more. When you approach your own mind with curiosity, you're not assigning moral value to your thoughts. You're not making them mean anything about you as a person. You're just observing them and being curious. When you're curious about your feelings, you aren't resisting them.

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You aren't assuming they're a problem. You're not trying to get away from them or numb them out. You're paying attention to them as physical sensations in your body. You're being curious about where they're coming from and why, what thoughts are causing them.

Just imagine you had a teacher who was trying to teach you something new, but any time you said anything, they yelled at you and held up a good or bad card. You would be scared to speak in no time, especially because, as a beginner student, all the cards would say bad because you would have no idea what you were doing.

Now, imagine you have a teacher who's curious about your answers. They want to understand why you answered the question that way. What were your assumptions? What was the logic you used to get that answer or get that question? Why did you think to say the thing you said?

Now you can actually learn something. So you can see how curiosity goes hand in hand with the idea that your thoughts are morally neutral. They aren't good or bad. They don't mean anything about you. They're just electrical signals in your brain. Practicing curiosity instead of judgment is so powerful in your relationship with other people too. Rather than immediately assuming you know why people are doing things or that you know that they should be acting differently, what if you were curious about their thoughts?

Your thoughts create your actions. Their thoughts create their actions. So be curious with others, be curious with yourself and your whole life will change. If you're listening to this Thursday, May 9th, you can sign up for The Clutch today and you'll get the workbook for this week's episode in your email tomorrow.

It's all about helping you distinguish judgment from curiosity and applying curiosity to your own thoughts, plus this month's life coaching and teaching webinar in The Clutch is all about judgment versus curiosity and allowing

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negative emotion. So we're really taking this topic deep this month; www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. See you in there.

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.