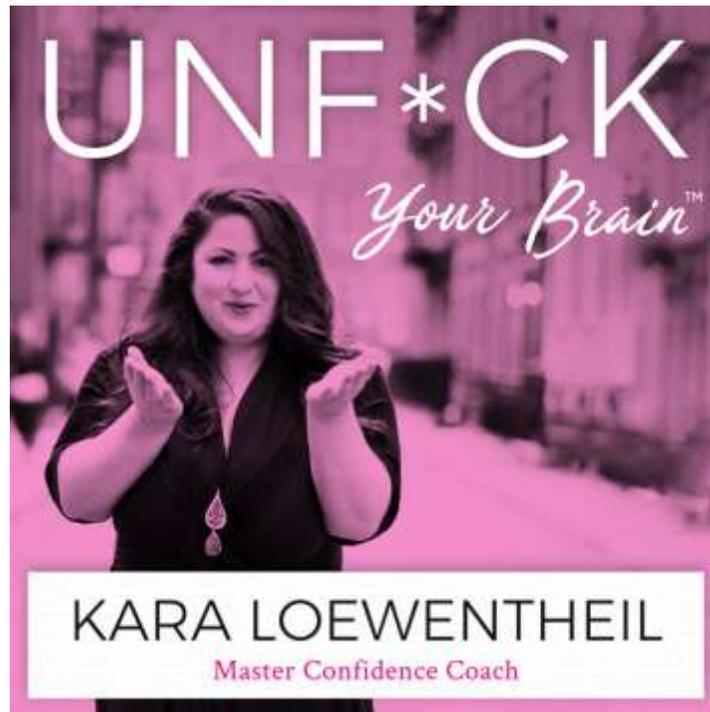


UFYB 114: Wanting Vs. Having or the Pleasure of Desire



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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UFYB 114: Wanting Vs. Having or the Pleasure of Desire

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 just got done teaching my How to Get Really Fucking Organized training, which is always super fun. It's a free training I do that teaches you the overview of the five principles you need to fulfill for an organizational system to work. And that's it for 2019, but I'll probably do it again in 2020.

So you can keep an eye out for that. And if you don't want to wait for that and you're really hoping to get your shit organized in 2020, there's a whole module that goes in-depth in the process in The Clutch. We actually have an amazing new feature, so you don't have to try to remember to get online and Google and find The Clutch if you want to learn more about it.

I know you're probably driving or working out or doing the dishes, and it's not convenient. So now, all you have to do is text your email address to 347-934-8861 and we will text you right back with a link to all the information you need to learn about and join The Clutch right to your cellphone.

Super easy, super-efficient. So just text your email to 347-934-8861 if you want to learn more about The Clutch and we will send you a link to everything you need right on your phone. Technology, it's amazing, right? Also, hilarious because I'm sure I'm always 10 years behind whatever the real - probably the young influencers in Instagram can now just text straight to your brain or something and I'm like, we can send you an email.

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What can I say? This is what we got. I'm impressed with this. Okay, so today I want to talk about something that I think can become especially poignant around the holidays. It's a time that there's a lot of family and romantic togetherness happening. I mean, people are drinking eggnog around the fire, or they're getting engaged or they're taking ski trips.

I don't know what people do for Christmas. My family is Jewish and we don't really have a big December celebration and we all mostly live in the same city, so nobody's traveling home for the holidays. So it's just not a big thing for us. So I don't have this particular kind of December baggage, but I know that it's a tough time for a lot of people who do.

And at the same time, there's all this consumerism. There are all these advertisements that are telling us like, things to buy or eat or drink or consume. There are ads suggesting that you buy a \$2000 Peloton bike or a \$50,000 car for your spouse. It's hilarious car commercials with the giant bows on them.

So I've been thinking a lot about desire and what it means to desire or want something because I think there's a lot of that feeling around the holidays. People either feeling like they want or desire things they don't have, or we're being kind of sold and advertised to, to increase our desire for things to get us to spend money around the holidays.

And this is some work I've actually been doing in my own life as well, and so I want to share it with you because it's such a powerful shift, even though it really takes a lot of brain retraining. So let's agree, or as my old lawyer life would say, let's stipulate that desire is an emotion, it's a feeling. It's caused by our thoughts. So it's a feeling in our body, it's a set of sensations in our body that are caused by our thoughts.

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And I think it feels like a yearning or a longing, which are really more words for other emotions. It feels for me like something in my chest near my heart, in the center of my body is being pulled towards whatever I'm thinking I desire or I want. It's like a physical pull on my body, pulling it from the inside out.

It might feel different for you, but for me, that's what wanting something feels like, especially if I'm wanting a person. It doesn't have to be sexual desire, it might just be like, wanting to see a friend I haven't seen in a long time. That's how that feels. But it can vary by the thing that I want.

So if I'm thinking about a certain food and wanting that food, I might salivate. Or my physical sensations might be more in my stomach. And I find for whatever reason, if I'm wanting or desiring an object, if I have the thought like, "Oh, I want to buy that dress," and I experience the emotion of desire for it, I feel that more in my throat.

So it moves around my body depending on what I'm wanting and my thoughts about it, and yours might be totally different. But I'm just giving you some examples to kind of underline the basic premise that desire or wanting is an emotion that we experience as a set of physical sensations in our body, which is how we experience all emotions.

That's what an emotion is. It's a set of physical sensations in our body that is caused by our thoughts. And I think what's interesting about desire is that we seem to inherently experience it as something that we want to satisfy. So we feel desire or we feel wanting and it doesn't feel negative per say, I don't think.

It's not like anxiety where we just want to get rid of anxiety and go back to neutral. I don't think we feel the same agitation or rush to get rid of the

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feeling of desire or wanting. We don't necessarily interpret desire or wanting as a negative emotion. But we do want to satisfy it.

So I think we experience wanting or desire as positive if we believe we can satisfy it, and negative, if we believe we can't. So if you're desiring something or someone you can have, it can feel delicious. As long as you think you're going to get what you want pretty soon.

But what about when you can't have it? Either you can't have it right away or you can't have it at all, then it can feel really painful, even excruciating. Whole bodies of art and literature are devoted to the pain of unrequited love. The people who are restricting their diet out of negative emotion and fear can spend years fantasizing about foods they don't allow themselves to eat, feeling this painful desire.

Or if you want a partner and you don't have one, or you want children and you don't have one, or you want a yacht and you don't have one, whatever it is, you may experience a lot of suffering because of the not having of what you want.

And even wanting something you know you can have but not as soon as you want it, not immediately can be kind of painful and distracting. So that's why I think we really want to stop and interrogate our assumptions about wanting and desiring, and think about whether it's possible to experience them in a different way.

Because here's what I've been playing with. Why do we have to experience desire as something that we need to satisfy or get rid of? Because we think those are our two options. If we feel desire, we either want to stop desiring it, if we think we can't have it, then we just want to stop wanting it. Or we want to get what we want. We want to answer the desire.

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But what if we could learn to enjoy desire itself? What if wanting something could be pleasurable in the moment you want it? Whether or not it ever gets satisfied. What if we could experience wanting or desire as pleasurable in and of itself regardless of whether it gets satisfied?

If we could learn to enjoy the wanting, not just the having, I think that this would change everything for kind of two reasons. First, I think we can start by appreciating that wanting and desiring are emotions that we only get to experience before we have something. And the wanting and the desiring is what makes it satisfying to get it.

So it's just like that 50/50, black and white, hunger and fullness, love and loss, it's the absence of a desire for something that makes it satisfying to get it. When you are hungry, food tastes amazing. When you're satisfied or you're not hungry, food actually doesn't taste that good.

When people are going through chemo or some other medical treatments, they take medications or they even smoke medical marijuana just to create appetite to try to motivate themselves to eat to nourish themselves. Because without desire for food, humans won't eat. Without wanting and desire, we wouldn't go after the things we want.

And having that experience of wanting and desire and not having is what allows you to appreciate when you get what you want. That's what allows us to enjoy and luxuriate in a pleasure or an accomplishment or a person or whatever it is, we can enjoy our friend's company because we don't always have it, and because we've experienced wanting it.

The pleasure that you derive from finally having what you want is all because you wanted it to begin with. If someone gives you something you don't want, you don't get any pleasure from it. So desire and pleasure, wanting and satisfaction go together. You can't have one without the other.

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So I think as the first step, we can start to appreciate wanting or desire for the way it brings pleasure into focus and heightens our enjoyment. So when we are suffering from it, we can at least try to appreciate that it's setting the stage for us to enjoy satisfying it when we're able to.

But there's a level beyond that too. Because we don't always get what we want or what we desire. So what if we could enjoy wanting or desire, even when we're not sure we will get the satisfaction or even when we know we won't? What if you experience desire for something or someone that you can't have?

I think it's possible to still enjoy that pleasure or that desire. I think learning to enjoy wanting or desiring something that you either don't know you have or even know you won't have can be incredibly powerful. And this is why. When you think about it, desire and wanting are the ultimate forward-focused emotion. They're future-focused.

Desire or wanting by its nature is future-oriented. It's urging you towards the time when you will get to satisfy the desire or the want. So in order to learn to enjoy desire, or enjoy wanting as it is happening in the moment, we would have to slow down. We would have to reorient our awareness and our emotional focus from the future, which is where we want to go mentally, to imagine the desire being satisfied, in order to focus on the present.

We would have to pay attention to our desire, to our wanting. Whatever it is we are wanting. Food, a house, a job, a pet, a person, a yacht, whatever it is. What does it feel like? Where is it in our body? What are those sensations? What if those sensations themselves could be pleasurable?

What if we could come to enjoy wanting or desiring as much as we enjoy having or even more because we know once we have it, we will become satiated? We won't get to experience that desire or that wanting anymore.

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You never enjoy something so much as the moment when you want it and you imagine what it will be like to have it.

Learning to enjoy the wanting or the desire for something is a practice of finding pleasure and joy in the present moment. Even when what you are finding pleasure in is the desire for a pleasure that you don't have yet. I know it's a little brain-breaking, but I kind of think it might be the secret to everything.

There's nothing more human than seeking pleasure, and there's nothing more human than having a future-focused mind that is always leaving the present and ignoring the present in order to imagine the future. So if we practice leaning in and learning to enjoy wanting, learning to enjoy desire, learning to enjoy hunger, emotional hunger, maybe even physical sometimes too, we are orienting ourselves towards finding the pleasure in simply being who and where we are at this moment in time.

If we can learn to enjoy longing or yearning or desire, then we do not have to spend all of our time in our minds in the imaginary world where every want and desire we have is fulfilled. We don't have to live our lives jumping from pleasure to pleasure, without ever being able to rest in between.

Y'all know I am pro-pleasure. I am not an ascetic. Much more of a hedonist. But I think we can learn to enjoy the pleasure of desire. The pleasure of wanting. It's a sharp pleasure, but that's okay. It's the way that in certain contexts, I think pain can feel like sharp pleasure. Even if you're not into kink, a deep tissue massage. A lot of people enjoy that. It's a little painful, but it also feels good.

Nostalgia can feel pleasurable, or bittersweetness can feel pleasurable. Or wistfulness can feel pleasurable. The way that being a little sad about a

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long past love affair can feel pleasurable when it's raining outside and you're listening to music that takes you back to that time.

A little sadness, a little ache, a little pain, a little desire that isn't met, these things are part of the human experience and if you are willing to be with them, there's a pleasure in them. And here's the last piece; if we were okay with feeling desire or feeling wanting and having wants that we were not going to satisfy immediately, then we wouldn't be in such a rush all the time to change our circumstances.

We would stop being so agitated about chasing the things we think we need in life in order to feel okay. We would be able to slow down and get to know our present moment and get to know our desire, our wanting, our hunger, our longing.

What kind of incredible information would we discover if we were willing to see what could be pleasurable in those emotions? Even if it doesn't feel as much of a kind of dopamine overload as when you satisfy a desire immediately, what would you learn from being willing to find that kind of unmet desire pleasurable?

So that is my suggestion for you this week, chickens. Next time you want something and you want to rush to satisfy that desire, or you want to feel terrible because you don't believe you can ever satisfy it, what if you let it be and you slow down and you get comfortable with it? What if you practice enjoy the wanting?

I think paradoxically being able to enjoy the wanting actually makes it easier for us to get what we want because we aren't trying to rush away. Anything we're trying to rush away from, we usually keep creating for ourselves. Whatever that old saying is, what you resist persists.

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So I think that if we were willing to experience and find pleasure in the wanting, we wouldn't be in such a rush and we wouldn't be so resistant to our current reality, and we actually would have a better chance of creating something different.

But even if we don't create something different, even if we never satisfy that desire, you've had what you wanted all along, which is just to feel pleasure and present in your own experience. And if you identify with being very future-driven and pleasure-focused, then you should definitely come join The Clutch because that is who I used to be and I can help you work on learning how to live in the moment and find the joy in your present day.

Text your email address to 347-934-8861 and we will text you right back with a link to all the information you need to learn about and join The Clutch right to your cellphone. Super easy, super-efficient. So just text your email to 347-934-8861 if you want to learn more about The Clutch and we will send you a link to everything you need right on your phone.

Alright, happy New Year, my chickens. I wish you many desires, only some of which will be met.

If you're loving what you're learning in the podcast, you have got to come check out The Clutch. The Clutch is the podcast community for all things *Unf*ck Your Brain*. It's where you can get individual help applying the concepts to your own life.

It's where you can learn new coaching tools not shared on the podcast that will blow your mind even more, and it's where you can hang out and connect over all things thought work with other podcast chickens just like you and me. It's my favorite place on earth and it will change your life, I guarantee it. Come join us at www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. It's unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. I can't wait to see you there.

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