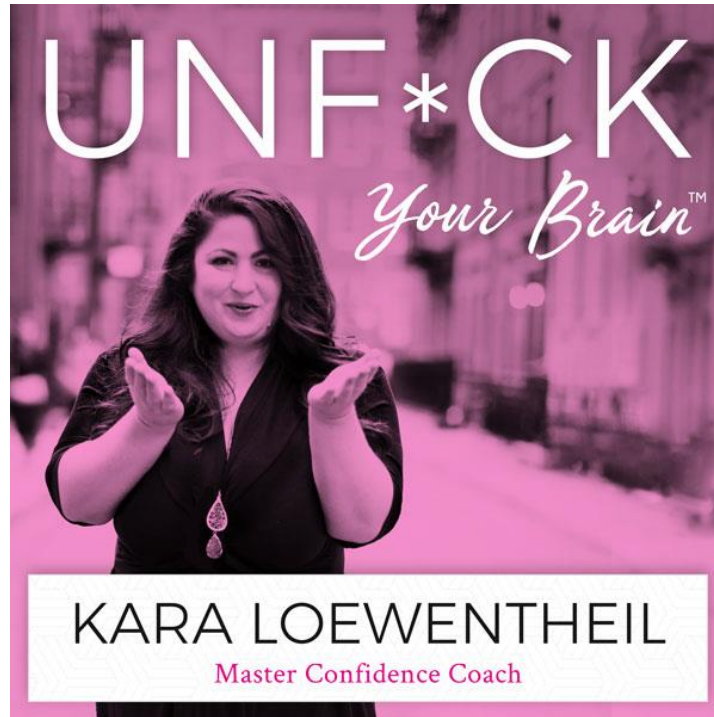


UFYB 139: Let's Talk About Sex Vol 2



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. So today, we are going to be continuing last week's conversation about sex and how thought work impacts our experience of sex. So just like we assume that our emotions and our thoughts just happen to us and are caused by outside forces, we assume the same about our sexual attraction.

So, our current model culturally of sexual attraction is based on really biology and hormones, and so we assume that it's outside, not only of our total control, but really even of much influence from us. We think we are just attracted to someone or just not attracted to them.

And if our attraction changes in either direction, we think that's just a mysterious force that we can't do anything about. So, I want to say before we get any deeper, that I absolutely do believe that there is a biological basis to attraction. That is part of the picture.

I do not think sexual orientation is a choice, for instance, and I don't think you can kind of think your way into being attracted to anyone, anytime, anywhere, no matter what. I'm not saying it's 100% mental. But it's not all or nothing. The options aren't black and white.

The fact that there is a biological element to attraction, especially to I think orientation, doesn't mean that all attraction is biological and that your thoughts about yourself and the other person and your sexual dynamic don't have an impact on your experience because they absolutely do.

All you have to do to know that's true is look at long-term couples who start out hot and heavy sexually, and then their sexual desire for each other

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changes. Now, if it was just a biological phenomenon that was caused by the other person's pheromones, that wouldn't happen.

And we already really acknowledge this when we talk about - we often talk about becoming more or less attracted to someone based on how they talk and how they behave, and we know how familiar we are with them in both directions. So, it's not just pheromones. It's not just biology.

And this is important to know because it means that we can have some influence over who we're attracted to and continuing to create attraction to them. And it also means we can understand how our thoughts and feelings are impacting our experience of attraction and then we can decide if we want to change it.

So this is crucial I think for a couple of reasons. For instance, if you're trying to change your dating patterns, a lot of us get very addicted to the excitement of dating people who are inconsistent, who are hot and cold, who are into us, then not into us. And that's because we get kind of addicted to the highs of that validation that follow the lows of that feeling of rejection.

And we can start to mistake that for exciting chemistry when that's what we're used to. And so, for a lot of my clients, my students, what I see is that when they start dating someone more stable, they often find them kind of boring and not exciting because they're used to those highs and lows.

And so, using thought work to rewire your brain to create more attraction to that kind of stable person can be so helpful, as long as there's some basis for that attraction. I was actually just coaching a client on how attraction can change over time in long-term relationships, which is the other place that this is super useful.

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And she reported that her sex life with her boyfriend had gone downhill over the course of their relationship, over multiple years. So I asked her, "What were you thinking when you first got together?" And she said she was thinking thoughts like, "This is amazing, we have great sex, I'm so attracted to him, I can't wait to touch him."

Then I asked her what her current thoughts about their sex life were, and she said, "Our sex life isn't great. I don't really enjoy this. This isn't fun. I'd rather not, this used to be better." And I was like, right, this is not rocket science. "This is amazing, we have great sex, I can't wait to do it," creates a very different experience than, "I don't enjoy this, this isn't fun, I'd rather not, this used to be better."

We have to remember our brains always think they're just describing reality to us. So our brain is like, no, when it was good, I told you it was good, and now it's bad, so I'm just showing you and telling you it's bad. It's just like the weather report. The thing is bad, I'm just reporting it. But that's not the truth about brains.

Really, we are creating our results with our thoughts. If you think sex is fun and amazing, then it's fun and amazing for you. If you think it's boring and terrible, then it's boring and terrible for you. Again, I'm not saying you should use thought work to make yourself attracted to someone you don't want to be attracted to.

Whenever we're doing something like that, the question is why are we trying to do that. But if you do want to be attracted to someone, especially if you're already in a relationship with them and you like the relationship and you used to be attracted to them especially, you have to recognize the power of how you're thinking about the attraction and your physical intimacy and how that's going to impact your experience of it.

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If you want to create more attraction to your partner, you can. You just have to get into your thoughts about them. And some of those thoughts may be about the sex and the attraction, and some of them just may be how you're thinking about your partner and the relationship in general.

If you spend all of your time thinking about how your partner isn't following your manual for what they do around the house or what kind of conversation they make with you or how they do their hair, you're unlikely to want to jump them. You have to consciously choose thoughts to think about your partner's desirability and enjoying sex in order to create that desire.

So, think back to what you used to think about your partner when you felt more attracted or you were more sexually motivated and focus on practicing those thoughts. And if you can't go there yet, that's okay. As always, you can always work with neutral thoughts that are easier to believe like, "Sex feels good once we get going," or, "I'm willing to give this a try and see if I get into it."

A lot of times, what's happening is that our thoughts about how sex should be or how it used to be get in the way of us appreciating what it's like now. So I hear from a lot of my students like, "Well, once we get into it, I enjoy it, but in the beginning, I don't want to and in the beginning of having sex and in the beginning of the relationship, I used to want to all the time. So I just keep thinking about how I used to want to all the time and now I don't."

I'm like, that is a terrible thing to be thinking about, right? That's a terrible thing to be focusing on. Like, that's like saying, "When I go for a run, I enjoy 90% of it. The first 10% sucks. But instead of thinking about the 90% I enjoy, I just constantly think about how 10 years ago when I used to go running, I enjoyed 100% of it."

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So you have to watch how you're thinking about your sex life is going to impact it so much. And practicing thinking thoughts that are going to help you create the result that you want about it. So, hormones and biology do play a role in sex but so do thoughts, and those things can be impacted by thoughts as well.

Again, I'm not saying it's 100% thoughts. But just like your physical experience of pain or chronic illness or pleasure or anything else, your physical experience of sex is impacted by your thoughts about it. So that's thinking about your partner and kind of your sex with your partner.

And then there's your own thoughts about you that can impact your sexual experience. In volume one of this two-part series, I talked about your thoughts about your own desirability and sexuality and so if you didn't listen to that, you should go listen to that.

But here, I want to talk about our thoughts that come up more during sex. And so, for a lot of women, we're brought up to focus on other people's sexual pleasure and not our own. So, a lot of my clients have a hard time relaxing and enjoying sex because they're too busy thinking about their partner's pleasure, what does the partner want or like, what does the partner think of them and their body.

They're very focused on how their body - linking back to that last episode, how their body is performing as an object of desire. And I find that women and people socialized as women tend to get especially mentally hung up on receiving pleasure where all of the focus is on their pleasure, like receiving oral sex.

For a lot of women, it's very uncomfortable to only receive pleasure because we think of our sexuality as something that is supposed to pleasure the other person, to keep them happy and liking us. So, to just

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receive pleasure can be very uncomfortable, can feel very awkward, very vulnerable, very exposed.

Plus, many women aren't acquainted with their own bodies and what feels good to them because they have not been encouraged to explore on their own, or their thoughts about it have kept them from exploring with a partner. And so some of us aren't sure what we want, some of us aren't comfortable asking for what we want, and even when we do, some of us worry that we're taking too long or our partners don't like giving us pleasure.

And all of this interferes with enjoying sex, obviously. But all that can also be improved with thought work because the discomfort, the awkwardness, the vulnerability that you may feel when you're pleasure-centered, they're just feelings. And they're just caused by your thoughts. They're not unbearable, they're not going to hurt you.

You have to just figure out what thoughts you're thinking that are interfering like, "I'm taking too long or what if I smell weird or they don't really like doing this." You have to dig into those thoughts, not really during the moment usually but beforehand.

And then you have to practice thinking new thoughts on purpose like, "It's possible that if I enjoy giving them pleasure, they enjoy giving me pleasure too." That's one example that I have my students often use. It's important to do this work before you're actually in the moment.

So just like anything else, you can't wait until you're in the stressful situation and try to do thought work there for the first time. You have to dig into what your thoughts are before and come up with new thoughts you're going to practice on purpose. And then you have to practice them not just during sex but as much as you can beforehand and during and after. It's just like any other thought work practice.

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Because like anything else, it's a process. It's going to take practice. There's one other element of this that I want to make sure that I mention, which is that of course, a lot of people and particularly women or people socialized as women have experienced sexual trauma, and sometimes there are somatic responses in the body to that trauma.

And I think those are great things to work through with a trauma therapist if you have PTSD from sexual trauma of course. But you can also use your thoughts here as well. So maybe if you've experienced trauma and you have a very strong reaction to sexual intimacy, you're not even ready yet to work on pleasure, you just want to work on feeling safe.

Reassuring yourself that you're safe, giving yourself permission to engage only as much as you want to, only go as far as you want to, giving yourself permission to stop any time. Those are all ways of taking care of yourself that are basically just thoughts you have to practice a lot so that you believe them and that you're able to act on them in the moment.

That's the kind of thought, especially if you have a history of sexual trauma or you have a history of not speaking up about what you want or not feeling comfortable doing that, you can't just tell yourself like, "Well, intellectually I know I can say stop at any time," and just leave it at that and hope that that works. It obviously doesn't.

You have to practice believing those thoughts so hard that you are in charge, that you can stop whenever you want, that you are safe if you are in a sexual relationship that feels safe. You have to practice those thoughts a lot so that when you're in the moment and that response gets triggered, those thoughts are more naturally there and it's easier to think them.

Again, this isn't the complete solution, but it's part of what you can do, using thought work if you have those kinds of experiences and history. So wherever you're coming to your sex life from, your thoughts about yourself,

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your partner, and the act itself are going to be the biggest determiner of how you show up for the experience and what experience you have, what results you get.

If there's one thing you take away from this episode, and the last one, I want it to not believe the lie that all of sex and desire and arousal and pleasure and all of that is all biology and that you have no influence on it. Yes, there's biology, but your brain is part of your body and it impacts your body.

We talk about biology as if it doesn't involve the brain, but your brain is what directs all of the rest of your body to be producing all those different hormones and chemicals, so they're all related. Biology involves your brain and vice versa.

So don't leave your brain out of the equation when you are thinking about how to improve your sex life, how to feel more desirable or sexy for yourself, how to enjoy sex more or how to be more attracted to your partner or potential partners.

Your thoughts impact all of that and it's a huge disservice to you and to your sex life to tell yourself that you have no control over it and it's just some mysterious pheromone process. So that's what I want you all to give a try this week, my chickens, and I'll talk to you next week.

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