

# UFYB 184: Black & White Thinking



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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## UFYB 184: Black & White Thinking

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? I hope you are all warm and dry inside your coops. It is raining here in New York today. It's very grey and drizzly. I feel like this happens every spring. It's like spring is sprung and we all get so excited, and then it rains for two weeks.

But that's okay because everything that's going to grow needs that water. April is always a big month for me, which is when I'm recording this. It's my birthday, it's also The Clutch's birthday. And I actually wanted to - before we dive into this episode, I wanted to share this amazing post that one of my students made.

So actually some of you have heard her talk before about thought work she's done because she was on a previous episode, maybe I guess a year ago probably at least, maybe more than a year ago where we talked about the work she had done on dating anxiety.

If you guys remember, those of you who have been long-time listeners, I did a series of interviews with some of my students about the work they've done because kind of no matter how often I say, I work on this stuff and I'm not special in terms of this work working for me, and I'm not just naturally chill, I've had to do all this work on it, there's just this human tendency to think like, well, the person teaching you, it comes easily to them, or it only works for them, or there's something wrong with you.

And so I always like to try to give you guys examples of my students who have also been able to use this work to change their lives so that it kind of helps convince that part of your brain that always wants to think you're different and not think it's possible for you.

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So she was already on the podcast and I think - I know we talked about her sort of dating anxiety, and I think when we did the episode, she had just started dating the person who is now her partner. So it was such a kind of nice update to get from her.

So she joined The Clutch in the beginning, which was two years ago. The Clutch is about to turn two, which is hard to believe. It feels like it just happened and also like it's been around forever. And people often ask, The Clutch is a monthly membership, meaning you join and then you can leave whenever you want.

And so - although I don't know why you'd want to leave because it's the best place ever, but you can. So people often ask how long should I stay in The Clutch, or how long does it take for people to see results, and I always say it really depends on what kind of results you want.

And one of the things that the psychological studies tell us is that people have this kind of cognitive bias where all of us, including still me sometimes, overestimate how much we can get done in a short period of time, and we underestimate what we can get done in a long period of time.

And so we've all done this. We have all sort of had a to-do list that's way too long for a weekend, or on the contrary, we have sort of told ourselves it's too late to change something in our lives, even when we're 35 or 25 or even 65 or 75. We still have plenty of time.

And I know this to be true for me because I still occasionally tell myself I can do more stuff in the short-term than I really can, based on my normal human energy levels. But also in terms of underestimating long-term potential, I have done that too for sure.

When I left The Clutch, my big goal was that in year three of my business, I wanted to be making \$150,000 in the business. And instead, in year three I

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made a million dollars for the first time. So I was obviously wildly underestimating what I could accomplish in the long-term, but it's such an issue, and it's one of the biggest dream stealers because I see this when people join The Clutch but I also just see this in any time we set a big goal.

We have an unrealistic expectation of how much we should be able to get done in the short-term. Like in The Clutch for example, that's when people are distraught and posting that they've been working on it for three weeks and they still have some negative thoughts.

And I'm like, yeah, of course, you're a human. First of all, we're all going to have negative thoughts sometimes for the rest of our lives. That's just being a human. But also, it's been three weeks, you just learned this. And I have so much empathy for that, I remember what that felt like. You sort of dare to try something new and then if you don't immediately become a different person, you think it's failed.

And so that's kind of the bias for the short term and thinking things should work faster than they should, but then part of what happens is because we don't understand that bias and we don't realize how bad we are at seeing long-term benefits, then we give up on the thing.

Whether it's our yoga practice or our thought work or trying to eat more vegetables or not yell at our kids, whatever it is we're trying to do. We think we should be able to get more done than we can in the short term and then when that doesn't happen, we give up on the long term. And that's what steals and kills our dreams.

So my student posted this on her second-year anniversary and she was like, graduating herself from The Clutch. So when I talk about how much time I sort of recommend or what do I see, I see that people get benefit right away, and that they start to become more resilient and have a little

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more space between their thoughts and feelings and have a little more control over what's going on in their minds.

That does start to happen very quickly. Week one, week two, week three, week four, that's already happening. What I see is that the people who truly transform their lives have stuck it out with the work for about a year usually, and then sometimes even more and they're doing even more amazing things with their lives.

But that 12-month period is kind of the amount of time that I have seen it sort of takes for people to really change everything they wanted in their lives. And then often they get to that year and they're like, okay, my life is where I want it and now I want to do something big and amazing and exciting, and that's what I'm going to work on in the second year.

So anyway, this is what she posted. She's graduating herself after two years. I just wanted to share this with you because I think it's so important for y'all to hear that it works for other real people. I mean, I am a real person and I talk all the time about what my brain is still like.

So I try to be so transparent and authentic with you guys and never pretend that I have it all figured out, this all came naturally to me, but human brains are going to human brain, and some of your human brains think that somehow this must just come naturally to me, and so you wouldn't be able to do it.

So I think it's so important to share the stories from my students because then you see normal regular people like me and like you and like them can all do it. So here's what she posted.

"I've been in The Clutch since the beginning. It'll be almost exactly two years and it has truly transformed my life. Coming into The Clutch, I struggled with significant dating anxiety, believing I was broken and needed

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a partner to validate my worth. And I was miserable at my job, drowning in emails, stressed, and frustrated. I was able to completely change my experience at my job with my thinking. To maximize my time and get everything done with ease, and I got a new position with higher pay in the same organization.

I learned to truly believe I'm worthy and not broken, and now I'm in a loving long-term relationship and living with my partner. I've loved the friendships I've built in The Clutch with some amazing people. Seeing everyone grow has filled my heart and given me so much hope for the future of our world."

This just makes my heart so full. And I love that she talks about the friendships she's made with other people in The Clutch because you always see that saying going around that's like, you are the average of the top five people you spend time with or whatever it is.

And I little bit hate that because we can manage our minds and some of us due to circumstances outside our control have to spend time with people that don't have thought patterns that we want to emulate. And I don't like the idea of telling people that that means that's who they're going to become, so I don't believe that's true at all.

When I first started doing thought work, I didn't know anybody else around me doing it and I was still able to change my life. But that being said, it's obviously very helpful to have a community of people who are also doing this work, and certainly for me, I did a lot of it on my own and it was helpful but then I got into a community of people doing thought work and had friends who were in to thought work and learned all the places that I had had blind spots or missed things or was kind of doing it wrong or there was so much more growth there and so much more support, and I think repetition and immersion that comes from it. So, so good.

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Alright, what are we talking about today? What is our actual episode? I mean, that was all actually very useful coaching and teaching for you guys, so this is like a double episode. Because honestly, if you ended it now and just took away the point about how we give up on things too easily because we think more should happen in the short term and then we destroy our long-term chances for fulfillment and happiness, that's pretty much as important as any episode could be.

But we're going to talk about some other stuff too. So here is what I want to talk to you guys about. This was already on my plan to talk to you about, but then I had this perfect convergence happen where I got a direct message from a client and colleague of mine, same person.

She's a colleague because she's a coach, but also she's one of my students, about a decision I'd made. And it totally fit into today's topic, so I was really glad that she sent it, and I can kind of use it as a vehicle for explaining this teaching to you.

So I'm going to tell you what the message was about, and then I'm going to teach you the concept. And then at the end, I will explain how I made the decision that was in question and why.

So as some of you know, and some of you have made this request, I have been getting requests for years to do a coaching certification because I have developed this kind of unique body of work and there hasn't been a structured way for coaches to learn it from me and be able to use it in their own work appropriately.

So this year for the first time I offered this program called the Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching. I have some amazing coaches going through it now, we're actually wrapping it up this month. You're going to hear some of them on the podcast.

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And so at least one of them is a weight loss coach. I, of course, am an anti-diet culture, fat positive, body positive coach. I don't teach or coach on weight loss, and in some ways, weight loss coaching is antithetical to a lot of what I teach.

But you've all heard me talk before about how I nevertheless have colleagues and friends who are weight loss coaches and I've talked to some of them on this podcast. And I don't have an orthodoxy test on this at least for my personal relationships.

I'm not saying that somebody who does have an orthodoxy test or a sort of hard boundary about this is wrong. This is just how I choose to live my life. I feel like I personally had 30 years of being very, very orthodox about my political beliefs, my feminist beliefs, my personal beliefs, and not brooking any disagreement or opposition and not having people in my life who didn't agree with me about everything.

So I tried life that way and for me, incompatible with the kind of curiosity and non-judgment and subjectivity that is what my coaching is about and which saved my mental life. So that's my personal choice, that's my business, my brand, this is how I do it.

So one of my students who's also a coach and she is also an anti-diet, body positive coach. She heard that I had a weight loss coach in my advanced certification and she reached out to me, and in fact, it was kind of funny. She originally reached out to say you should know someone is out here lying, saying that you train them, but that can't be right because they're a weight loss coach.

She thought that she was telling me that there was an imposter out there. And so I responded to her and I said, "Well, I'd have to know the person's name." Obviously didn't know if they were in my program but that would be



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weird for someone to lie about and there is at least one weight loss coach in my advanced certification right now so it might be that person.

And so my student, the one who was messaging me was just kind of baffled by this and she was totally respectful and polite. But she basically just said, how can you train someone and know that they're going to go out there and call themselves a feminist weight loss coach and kind of have your blessing and your name attached to that?

And that's a totally valid question, but I'm going to leave it unanswered for now because I want to talk about black and white thinking and how it shows up, and then I'm going to answer that question at the end, by which point I think it will make more sense to you.

So what is black and white thinking? Black and white thinking is thinking in extremes. It's thinking when everything is either one thing or the opposite. So black and white thinking is like things are good or bad, things are healthy or unhealthy, foods are healthy or unhealthy, emotions are healthy or unhealthy, relationships are health or unhealthy.

Things are wonderful or things are terrible, things are right or things are wrong. In black and white thinking, there's only every two choices. You're on the wagon, you're off the wagon, you're right, the other person's wrong. If they're right, then you're wrong.

People are either on your side or they're against you, things are either fair or unfair. Black and white thinking is characterized by pairs of opposites. It can also show up in a less obvious way as believing that there are only two choices.

When we are looking at some kind of problem, whatever it is, we're trying to understand why someone else is behaving the way they are, or what we

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can do about a situation in our life, and we tell ourselves there's only two choices. That's actually black and white thinking.

It also comes up in thought patterns like I can only win or lose. One person wins, one person loses. I can only do one of these two things. I can't have an amazing career and be an amazing mom. Can only be one. Or if you're in a power struggle with someone, you both want different things, it's sort of like, well, either I get my way or they get their way. Those are the only two options.

And black and white thinking is everywhere. It is incredibly common in people who come to coaching, which makes sense. I think a lot of us come to coaching because we have very black and white thinking that is ruining our lives and making us miserable, and we desperately need to learn how to see shades of grey.

But it's not just us. Black and white thinking is a big part of many religious traditions, there's good and evil, you're one or the other, you're saved or you're damned, things are - it's God or Satan. Something is virtuous or something is sinful.

It's part of some philosophical traditions. There's good and bad, there's right and wrong, there's morally correct or immoral. It's a huge part of politics. Both conservative political circles and social justice circles, right or left, really irrelevant. Many people are very deeply enmeshed in politics for whom politics and political parties are a big part of their identity have a lot of black and white thinking.

And I'm talking about my former self among them. And I still care a lot about politics, I just don't have as much black and white thinking about it. But the idea that we're right and they're wrong and any idea that they have has to be had and all of our ideas are good, we don't think that we think that.

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If I asked you, if let's say you are a liberal and I said, do you think every idea a conservative has ever had is stupid? You would probably say no, that can't be logically true. But we actually respond from that subconscious belief. Anything promoted by a person or by a politician or a leader that we don't like we automatically assume is bad, anything promoted by one that we do like we automatically assume is good.

Huge part of diet culture. Some foods are good, some foods are bad. You're good when you're eating the right thing, you're bad when you're eating the wrong thing. Some foods are healthy, some foods are unhealthy. It's these dichotomies.

It's not - shades of grey would be like, almost all food has some nutrients. I think all food. I don't think you can eat anything that has no nutrients. All food has nutrients and it acts in different ways in our bodies and sometimes it's more health promoting and sometimes it's less health promoting but it's on a spectrum. Versus these foods are unhealthy, these foods are healthy.

Or even you're body positive or you're part of diet culture, there's no in between. Black and white thinking often goes along with the form of tribalism. And I mean that in the social anthropological sense. When we see ourselves as an in group of likeminded people who share the same values or traditions or belief, then we see anyone outside the group as an outsider and an other.

We tend to gloss over or we don't see the shortcomings of our own side, our own group that we're in, our in group, and when we look at the out group, we only see the shortcomings. And we have very exaggerated characteristics, exaggerated ideas of them that are in opposition to our ideas about ourselves.

We always want the best for people, they don't care about people. Black and white thinking. We're peaceful, they're violent. We're good, they're bad.

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We're smart, they're dumb. Black and white thinking has a lot of downsides but before we kind of get to those, we have to understand what it's doing for our brains that our brains find positive.

It's doing something for us, that's why so many of us have a problem with it. And here's what it's doing. It provides us with the illusion of certainty. Our brains love certainty. Your brain evolved to preserve energy because you never know when you might need that glucose to fuel your muscles to run away from something that wants to eat you.

If we had to start every day with no idea of what was going on, if we woke up every morning and we were like, where am I? Who's my friend? Who's my enemy? Who's going to help me eat and who's going to try to eat me? What do I want to do? What do I not want to do? We would immediately be overwhelmed, and I've talked a lot on the podcast about how our brain uses heuristics, which are mental shortcuts that help us to not expend the labor of analyzing every new thing all over again.

So that when we get up, we know who we are and what a table is and what we like to eat for breakfast. We have these shortcuts so that we don't have to rethink about every single thing that comes up.

And black and white thinking I think is just an extension of that same strategy. Because shades of grey are confusing. They require a lot of brain energy to think about from multiple angles, they don't cohere into a clear narrative, they're not just a checkbox. It's not just good, bad, evil, great.

They're complex and nuanced. Black and white is simple. It's efficient. Us or them, good or bad, right or wrong. If we just use our shortcut, then we don't have to consider any perspectives or ideas outside of what seems obvious to us right away.

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And I've talked a lot about this on the podcast, that the human brain hates to be wrong. Hates it. You see this so much especially if you hang out with a lot of lawyers, which of course I do because I was one. And my family are lawyers and many of my friends are lawyers.

In law school, they just sort of train your brain to exacerbate this problem of not wanting to be wrong. And so you will see a lawyer will say something and it'll not even really make any sense or be obviously wrong, and then they will double down on it to the death.

But we all do that to some extent whether we're lawyers or not. We have beliefs and we would rather be wrong than learn new information. We think we're right, but we would rather just insist that we are right even when there's information to the contrary. We would rather just ignore that and believe that we're right because we don't want to have the uncertainty and the doubt and the confusion and the fear that comes up if we're wrong.

And for a lot of us, it's like, if I'm wrong about that thing, then either I'm a bad person or I'm stupid or unworthy, or what else am I wrong about? It's very destabilizing. Your brain is dealing with so much stimuli and input all the time, it just wants to already know what's happening and have certainty. Human brains do not like uncertainty.

So in this way, black and white thinking is actually a way that our brain defends its default beliefs or interpretations. Of course, the irony is that it's not actually that efficient because most of us spend quite a lot of energy trying to enforce our black and white beliefs on other people.

It would be one thing if we were like, this is black and white, no energy expended, and I'm just going to go about my day. But actually, when other people don't agree with us, we interpret that as a threat to our certain and so then we expend all this energy anyway, resisting the fact that they don't

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agree with us or trying to get them to agree with us. So the system doesn't even work the way it's designed.

But the illusion of certainty is comforting, it gives you a clear focus for your negative emotions. Humans don't kind of like to accept the idea that human life involves suffering because we have human brains. And instead, we want to pin the suffering on the bad person, the stupid person, the wrong person, whatever it is.

We want to be right and good, they're bad and wrong, they must be what's causing our suffering. I also think black and white thinking tends to happen particularly in groups or communities because it provides a sense of cohesion and community.

Humans evolved in small close-knit tribes where everyone needed to get along and cooperate to survive. And shared beliefs are often what hold communities together, especially if they're not all genetically related to each other.

So by definition, these beliefs kind of need to be black and white because a large group of people have to be able to agree on them and enforce them. And nuance and subtlety don't scale in the same way. And they don't create the same sense of agreement and cohesion that the human brain finds so comforting.

So black and white thinking is doing something for you and when you're in a community who shares your beliefs, there's sort of an enforcement of fact of black and white thinking that goes on. It gives you certainty. It's actually an illusion of certainty, but it's a comforting illusion.

And it may be making you feel safe because when you agree with other people who share those beliefs or that thinking, then you feel even more certain of being right. Now of course, the flip side is that means you might

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be terrified of disagreement and very, very anxious about anyone ever disagreeing with you. But that's a separate issue that I have talked about before in the episodes on rejection and I'm sure I will talk about again.

So bottom line, black and white thinking is saving your brain labor, keeping you energy efficient in your brain, or your brain thinks it is, giving you the illusion of certainty and stability so you don't have to reconsider what's going on all the time. Humans hate that. And potentially giving you community with other people who share your black and white beliefs and giving you a sense of in-groupness, which humans really like and an in group always requires an out group that we are different from.

The problem is that black and white thinking has a lot of negative side effects too. First of all, it really alienates us from ourselves and others. Yes, it may make us feel superficially closer to a group, but then there's also often this terror on the underside of being cast out from the group for violating the clear beliefs that everybody is supposed to share.

And on top of that, when we believe everyone is bad or good, or nice or mean, or healthy or unhealthy or whatever, feel alienated from anyone who doesn't behave exactly the way we want them to. This is the irony of taking comfort in being in an in group.

When you have an in group and an out group, you necessarily are alienated from the out group, but the payoff should be that you feel supported and held by the in group. But the problem is that what actually happens is that often if you have any thoughts that are any different from the rules or orthodoxy of the in group, you are then terrified that people will find out about that or you will be rejected because of them.

So you don't actually feel safe at all either way. Whereas paradoxically, if you got rid of the in group, out group theory, if you stopped having black and white thinking, if you believed everyone is a human doing their best for

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instance, you would actually feel so much commonality and kinship with everyone.

So that in and out group black and white thinking, it seems like it's giving us this sense of community, but often it's actually just a sort of veneer on the surface and the way that we would feel connected to more people is by letting go of that thinking. Because when we have black and white thinking, we have to feel alienated from anyone who doesn't behave exactly the way we want to.

And when we have black and white thinking, we have no capacity for compassion or acceptance or understanding of those who are different from us. And then we also apply those standards to ourselves. And we are complicated people, so we can almost never live up to our own black and white, good and bad standards. And then we have to judge ourselves all the time.

So when we have black and white thinking patterns, we're more likely to see ourselves as not good enough, as bad people, as failures, and we interpret everything in our lives and our own stories through that lens. We don't see the complexity and nuance. We just see whether we've won or lost or succeeded or failed in this very black and white way.

And all of that destroys our capacity for resilience and growth and change, which are processes that require a lot of shades of grey. They require seeing things in more than one way, tolerating discomfort, being able to fail at something and try again, which you can't do with a black and white mindset. All of that requires shades of grey.

And that makes us much less resilient and more prone to judgment, and superiority thinking about other people. Blocks our compassion, blocks our ability to understand the humanness of other people, especially people who disagree with us or seem outside of an in group that we value.

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But we don't fare any better because black and white thinking is more likely to lead to despair and helplessness and shame about ourselves. Since everything is either wonderful or horrible, we have to think we're either wonderful or horrible, and since we're humans, we generally don't think that we're wonderful. We're already trained to think we're horrible.

And if that were not enough, black and white thinking also hampers our creativity and our problem-solving because it makes us think something's either working or it's not working. It's easy or it's impossible. When we think in black and white terms, we set up false dichotomies or choices, where we make up two opposing options or two opposing points of view that are incompatible and then we tell ourselves those are our only options.

I have so frequently coached people who are trying to solve a problem but they've set up these two opposing ideas in their brains about whatever the problem is, and they can't see any other solution. So if you ever find yourself thinking or saying it must be this or that, those are the only two options, then you kind of know you're in black and white thinking because there's almost always at least a third option and sometimes a third through 300th option.

If you think about it, any new idea that someone has had to come from seeing that there's got to be another way to look at things than the existing options. So the more you can open your mind to different possibilities, the more creative your solutions and your ideas become. And that's so much easier when you aren't judging yourself as well, which is part of that black and white thinking.

So let's go back to the message I got from my colleague, my student, my student colleague, same person, about accepting a weight loss coach into my feminist certification. So the black and white thinking on this would be diet culture is anti-feminist, so that's a thought, it's not an objective truth we can prove but that's a thought some people have.

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Any weight loss coaching is diet culture, that's another thought some people have, therefore, any weight loss coaching is anti-feminist. And if you are doing a feminist certification, that means you should not have anyone in your program or certified under your name who does weight loss coaching.

So we want to notice what's unspoken and unconscious in this logic. That this set of beliefs about what is feminist are correct objectively, and that no one else's beliefs that might conflict with those beliefs could possibly be feminist.

And this is absolutely no reflection on my student, my colleague, my student colleague. This is completely common and it's a totally - I don't like the word valid because it sounds like you're making a ruling on something, but this is a chain of logic that works. This is logical, it just precedes from a certain premise, this is one of the reasons that logic is a tool but it's not an answer to things in the sense that logic always has to precede from a certain premise, and we all have different fucking premises.

So when we think we're being super logical and someone else is being illogical usually in my experience, humans are often actually being quite logical, just from very different premises. It's like we could both walk in a straight line, but if we start in two different points, we're not going to end up in the same place.

My thought process about this advanced certification did not have the same premises or chain of logic. So there are parts of me that are an idealist for sure, obviously. I think I am on a mission on changing the world. You have to be kind of idealist and have a big vision for that.

But I'm also super pragmatic and I think that's what comes honestly from doing actual social justice and reproductive rights work and advocacy in the real world for decades. If you do this work in the real world, you see it is not black and white, it is all shades of grey.

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I feel like the online social justice echo chamber is not the same as real world work. I'm not saying they don't overlap. It's a Venn diagram. There are for sure people doing work in both places. But if you are active in a real life movement, you very quickly come to see that there are people who strongly disagree with each other about every aspect of a problem, and sometimes about what the problem even is, and how to solve it, and who should be part of the solution, and who should get to decide the solution, and who should get to decide how we achieve the solution, and how we should achieve the solution and what the different options are.

It's all disagreement. There's some agreement, there's a lot of disagreements. It's all just thoughts, you guys. It's all thoughts, all the way down. And so for me, coming from that, I just don't have the same belief that everyone who is part of a social justice movement or even everyone who I teach has to have the exact same thoughts.

And I don't really have a litmus test like that. I would much rather that someone who is selling weight loss coaching learn about fat bias and size discrimination and white supremacy and all the other aspects of intersectional feminism that I teach and have that impact their approach, rather than have a purity test and not educate anyone who doesn't meet it.

And I just think about the effect I've had on the world when I went through life coach school training. There was a ton of weight loss coaching talk and I had to do a lot of self-coaching on it. But I became more resilient by doing that. I learned how to test my own beliefs and how to stand up for my own beliefs in contrast to a teacher I respected very much and my colleagues.

So that was strong for me, and I just think about how much I have been able to impact the other women who are running these enormous coaching businesses and coaching practices and on these mission and have these huge podcasts that are impacting and reaching women all over the world,

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me being in that room has changed the way that they think about their work.

I was just on Jody Moore's podcast, Better Than Happy, who is an incredible coach for women who are in the Church of Latter-Day Saints and reaching so many people that I would never ever reach. Not least because my podcast has a curse word in the title.

For me, and again, because I'm not a black and white thinker, I'm not saying this is the right way, maybe ideological purity is the right way and we're going to get a certified letter from the universe at the end and I will have been wrong.

But until that letter comes, we all have to make our own decisions about this. And that is not my way and that's not my decision. I care more about the impact that my work has on people and their work in the world than I do about what people think about my name being used or attached to someone who they disagree with.

I have strong beliefs, but I don't ever pretend that I know that I'm right and that other people are wrong. I can totally build an argument using logic that weight loss coaching is anti-feminist, and someone else can totally build an argument using logic that some ways of doing it are entirely feminist.

We are never going to get a ruling about who's right. I've been rewatching The Good Place recently. I'm like, the judge isn't coming to tell us who's right. Now, here's the thing, especially if you're a lawyer, people love to make slippery slope arguments.

If you would say that you would train a weight loss coach, would you train a Nazi coach, or would you train a coach who thinks women shouldn't be allowed to read? No. I would not admit someone to my certification who wanted to call themselves a feminist coach while coaching women to give

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up their legal rights and not educate their daughters or send them to school.

That's too big of a disagreement for me. And I don't pretend that there is a clear rule you can discern here because that is what the black and white thinking is. That there has to be a clear rule by which we know which things are right and which things are wrong, and which things are permissible and which things are not, and which things are okay and which things are too far.

There's not a clear rule. It's a judgment call. And we all make judgment calls. We are all constantly making judgment calls and it's black and white thinking and also socialization that teaches women to distrust themselves, which is why we think we need clear rules to think that there have to be clear rules.

I just said way too much in that sentence so I want to break that down because I think it's really important. I think that for a lot of women, black and white thinking is a reaction to the socialization we get to never trust ourselves and our own judgment and our own discernment.

We want there to be a right and wrong so we can know that we're right so we can feel safe. Because we're constantly being socialized to doubt ourselves. But in fact, we all live in the real world with shades of grey where we are all making judgment calls all the time.

We cannot always know what's right, we have to use our best discernment and our thinking and our beliefs and our values to make decisions, knowing that some people may not agree with them, or we may even change our minds later on and that's okay.

One of the things I feel like has been coming up over and over in this certification that I don't think I even knew was so much of what I was going

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to need to teach in it is that as coaches, we cannot rely on black and white thinking to have clear easy lines.

When life coaching pretends to have simple rules that solve every question, that's an amazing marketing perspective. It's very attractive to people. But it does all of us a disservice. I believe thoughts cause feelings, and I do believe that pretty universally.

But if someone else doesn't believe it, that's okay with me. I think you can still have an amazing life not believing that at all. It's not the life that I am choosing, but that doesn't mean there's something wrong with it.

A world of grey sounds like it would be dull and boring, but it's actually black and white thinking that is boring. It feels dramatic so it feels intoxicating but it's actually so rigid. Shades of grey are full of nuance and beauty and compassion and growth and that is where I want to live.

So if that is where you want to live too, here are some questions you can ask yourself when you feel like you're in black and white thinking, when you're having a strong reaction. How could the opposite or other side of this be true?

How could what this other person is saying be true? Where could I be wrong about this? What could a third option be? How could we split the difference here? How could we acknowledge both people's beliefs and values in reaching a solution? How could both of these things be true or how can either of them be true? What might be true instead? A third thing. Is there a third explanation or idea that I'm missing?

We only dig in our heels with black and white thinking because of what we make it mean about ourselves if we are wrong. But being wrong or changing your mind or seeing more than one side of things doesn't mean you were stupid or bad or unworthy before.

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It just means that you're growing and evolving. And we need to claim that for ourselves. We are all called upon to see the shades of grey in the world and use our discernment and use our judgment to make hard calls. And not pretend that it's black and white, that it's easy, that it's simple.

That's not true is my thought. You could choose the thought that it is true, but I don't think it leads to growth, I don't think it leads to evolution, I don't think it leads to good decision-making. And what I see so much with these students I've been teaching this is the more we believe there's a right and a wrong way to do things, or the more we try to believe that everything we do is always right or everything we do is always wrong, we're immensely fragile.

Black and white thinking seems strong but it's actually so fragile because when you are willing to live in shades of grey and love yourself and have your own back no matter what and know that it's always a judgment call and you're just doing your best with what makes sense for you and that's what everyone else is doing, you're so resilient.

Because there's no pedestal to tumble off of and there's no pit to fall into. You just get to be a human living in the shades of grey with other humans, all of whom are living in a way that makes sense to them and you can have compassion for them and compassion for yourself.

And that to me is the whole point of what we're doing here. Alright my chicken, go live a grey week. I'll talk to you soon.

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