

UFYB 185: (Part 1) Thought Work and “Cancel Culture”: A Conversation with Amber Taylor, Brig Johnson & Brenda Lomeli



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 friends. So I am so excited for you to hear the conversation that we're going to have on this episode and the next episode. It's about a topic that I have kind of historically had a lot of different thoughts and feelings about, and to some extent have avoided talking about because I was actually replicating some of the problems by thinking in this very all or nothing way about it, just like the black and white thinking episode I just did.

And sort of thinking that everything has to be like, being on one side or the other, or agreeing 100% or disagreeing 100%. And then once I realized that actually it was okay to just have a truthful, honest, nuanced, sophisticated conversation, it all opened up for me. And so I have some of my students coming on, and these conversations are so important, and I think you're going to get so much out of them.

Before we get to that, I want to say that I think a lot of what you will hear in these conversations is the ways in which some of our thoughts and feelings around what term to even use, because all the terms are so loaded and are “one side or the other,” but any of our feelings about being reproached or called in or called out or canceled or whatever term we want to use, being called to account, being offered critique, being invited into a better process and conversation, whatever we call it, we talk about how some of that stuff is actually just all mixed up in all of our own fears about what other people think.

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And so I wanted to remind you all that whatever your thoughts about yourself are, they don't have to stay that way and that I have a free resource called The Confidence Cheat Sheet that you can download and use to help you build up your self-confidence.

Because whatever your thoughts are about these issues that we tackle in this podcast, what is definitely true is that when you have negative thoughts about yourself, you can't really hear anything anyone offers you clearly, positive or negative.

So if you want to get that Confidence Cheat Sheet and use those concrete practices I teach in it, you can text your email address to +13479971784. Again, text your email to +13479971784 and use the codeword confidence when you're asked for the codeword, or you can just go to unfuckyourbrain.com/confidence.

Alright, I'll let past me take it away.

—

Kara: Hello my chickens. I am so - excited seems like a weird word for talking about this topic we're going to talk about, but I am really excited to have this conversation because I think that it is a conversation that really needs to be had. And like so many conversations that happen in social media community or even in the self-development or the social justice community, there's so much black and white thinking.

So those of you who have listened to the black and white thinking episode that I just did on the podcast, I really wrote that podcast episode as I was starting to think about having these conversations and where the kind of

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black and white thinking shows up in self-development, in social justice, in online interactions and how all of that kind of coalesces in our interactions and our thoughts about them.

So I invited three of my incredible students from my Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching to come talk to me about this. I'm going to let them introduce themselves. They bring a real variety of perspectives, but one of the things that I wanted to kind of acknowledge upfront is that as a white woman talking about these things, the whole idea of call-ins or call-outs or accountability culture or cancel culture, we're going to even talk about what the name is, is a social movement that comes out of Black communities and particularly Black feminist American communities, and it's also connected to practices of restorative justice that come out of different philosophical traditions, but especially South Africa after apartheid.

So the context of this, we need to be conscious of where we are and what communities we are in, in the context when we talk about it, and that's why I wanted to make sure that I had multiple people's perspectives in this conversation, aside from the fact that my students are just brilliant and each have had a lot of thoughts about this phenomenon that they're going to share with you.

So I'm just going to let them introduce themselves, but I'm just going to say who should introduce themselves for this so it's not chaos. So Amber, why don't you just introduce yourself first. Tell us who you are, who you coach, anything else you think we should know.

Amber: Yeah, awesome. My name is Amber Taylor and I dub myself as the Black experience coach. I coach Black women to be comfortable being their most authentic versions of themselves and then kick ass as that version of themselves. And I do that by identifying how they can center

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their own pleasure and gain confidence and authenticity in that way. I just wanted to shout-out I’m also a Clutch coach so...

Kara: Behind the scenes coming out.

Brig: I’m Brig Johnson and I coach high-achieving Black women and I help them show up in their most authentic self.

Kara: Amazing. Brenda.

Brenda: Hi everyone. My name’s Brenda. I’m happy to be a part of this conversation and share whatever experiences that I’ve had. I’m a master coach, I’ve been friends and colleagues with Kara for a long time and the work that I do with my clients that I’m very, very passionate about is really helping my clients be done struggling with weight and food, which is something that so many women spend so much of their life struggling with, and that was my experience, so that’s the work that I do.

I also this year in 2021, with my colleague Judith Gatton, we also started the Latinx Coaches Directory, which is something else that I’ve been up to and I’m happy to be here and a part of the conversation.

Kara: Brenda’s already famous on the podcast because first we did a podcast episode, and then when I did the black and white thinking podcast, I started off with talking about one of my student’s reactions to Brenda being on her podcast episodes. I don’t think you’ve even heard that yet.

Brenda: I haven’t.

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Kara: Just something we've talked about before. It's the combination of feminism and weight loss coaching. So on the black and white podcast, I take about how one of my students was like, wait, my brain is breaking, what's happening, you're having a weight loss coach on your podcast.

Brenda: Like why is Brenda here.

Kara: Okay, we're going to coach you on that later. I don't think it's about you. It's just about - but it's obviously surprising if you listen to my podcast for me to be like, now here's my guest, a weight loss coach. Obviously not in keeping with my normal branding, but I talk all about that in the black and white podcast. But just to say the people listening to the podcast will already know who you are well. They've heard from you once and then heard about the follow-up.

Brenda: Well, and I'll just say one more thing. I think that there's complexities in all of this. I'll say that much.

Kara: I feel like that's the theme of this whole conversation. So the first thing - and I messaged everybody before that I wanted to talk about what we even call it. Because we're going to need to use a noun when we're talking about it, but it feels to me like coming from reproductive rights work and abortion rights work, it was kind of similar where it's like, there was no neutral term.

It's like you're pro-life or you're pro-choice and there was no kind of is there a third word we can use to describe the things we're talking about that doesn't immediately position us as having like, a particular staked out position. So people who oppose whatever it is we're talking about, which we have to define, would call it cancel culture, and people who support it

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would call it accountability processes, maybe call-in culture, maybe there are other terms for it.

But I'm like, what are we going to call it? What words can we use? And we have to even define what we're talking about that aren't already like, now I've staked a position and I'm on these people's side or these people's side about this thing. It's that exact complexity.

So I'm curious what you guys think. I think the thing that I'm talking about is sort of - let's see if we even mean the same thing is the practice of publicly identifying people and identifying whatever actions that someone thinks they have taken that are considered to be problematic, and then having a sort of semi-disorganized, semi-organized public conversation or campaign around that, which may involve requests for accountability of some kind, which may involve requests for apology, may involve requests for specific actions that some people want other people to take, may involve people activating their social networks to weigh in and get involved.

I'm trying to describe this in very neutral terms. Just to make sure we're all talking about the same thing. That's the circumstance is that these things occur. But what are we even going to call that? I'm curious if you guys have any ideas.

Amber: Well, I went to the internet and I found a professor, Lisa Nakamura at University of Michigan. She defines it as a cultural boycott of a certain celebrity, brand, or cultural concept. And Merriam-Webster says cancel culture is a demand for greater accountability from public figures.

Kara: Yeah, that's interesting. A boycott or a - it feels like it's both because it's not just like don't buy this person's whatever. It's sort of like, there's this

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public conversational and performance aspect to it. I just think about like, the Park Slope Coop famously had a big debate about boycotting Israeli products, but it wasn't sort of like, okay, the CEO of Sabra hummus needs to make a certain kind of Instagram post. It's sort of like, boycott is sort of like, are we going to purchase these things? But I like that. That does feel like a little more neutral.

Brenda: I think it does feel challenging to give it a label I guess if we were going to give it a label that can acknowledge - I guess if we were to call it both parts or the different roles that it can serve.

Kara: I feel like online accountability discourse. Is that kind of like...

Brig: I kind of like the word accountability in there because I think the intent is in some sort or another, maybe the delivery but the intent is some form of accountability or change.

Kara: Which is such an interesting concept from a thought work perspective, right? And I think that's something we need to talk about. Okay, so how do we feel about calling it online accountability discourse and process, or processes? One of those kind of.

Brenda: I feel like I need to look up the definition of discourse.

Kara: Well, because I think there's sort of both. Sometimes there's specific campaigns happening and sometimes it's more just a conversation about whether these things should even exist or who gets to decide, whatever.

And I do think we should specify accountability as a word usually used by people who support this kind of process and it sounds positive, and I think

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we’re really using it to mean like, that’s the claim being made, is that accountability is involved. It’s not us saying and that’s always correct or always incorrect. It’s just that’s the thing that the person doing it is trying to do is to create some kind of accountability that they think should happen.

Brenda: Okay, for anyone listening who maybe also doesn’t know what discourse means, I looked it up, written or spoken communication or debate. Yeah, it’s like I get that word now because it’s just descriptive in a kind of objective way.

Kara: Sorry, I’m an asshole. I’m an academic. This is from the academia - discourse is the word potato. Everyone’s just like...

Brenda: One of the things, benefits for me of just being your friend Kara and being around you, I just learn so many new words. And initially I just used to be embarrassed and I just would keep it to myself, look it up later, and I’m like oh cool, I’ll just look up that word.

Kara: I just use weird words though like nobody has used since the 18th century because when I was a child, we didn’t have a TV and my father just had us reading 19th century literature. So I totally am just using words - discourse is used now, but I will say things and people are like, nobody has said that since 1845. That’s not a word that people use anymore.

Also, doesn’t matter how educated you are. Until I was 35, I thought the word misshapen was pronounced mis-hapen. And then somebody said it out loud and I was like, you know, that makes a lot more sense actually. Given the definition of the word, that sort of checks out. But I just was like, walking around saying mis-hapen and nobody was correcting me.

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Anyway, so I have this whole list of questions. I don't know if we'll get to any of them, but actually, I kind of just want to ask - let me do this life coach way, not academic way, which is why were each of you interested in talking about this with me. I'm curious - this didn't come out of a vacuum. We're having conversations in Slack and you all were weighing in on them, and then I was like, let's do a podcast on this in our advanced certification Slack. So I'd be curious just to hear from you all like, why did you want to come discuss this? Even if Brenda, you're like, maybe I hate this idea, it was terrible.

Brenda: Well, I guess I'll start. It came up in our coaching actually, so you and I Kara, we're in a mastermind where you and I and a couple other of our life coach colleagues, we've been supporting each other in our business goals for years, specifically growth and revenue goals.

And in the past couple months, for me there's been this fear, just every time that we have met for our mastermind, there's been this year and it feels almost like a primitive fear, like I would feel it in my body. And really in my head it was like, the fear of being canceled. Like oh my gosh, Instagram is like, that's the place where you get canceled.

Or if I was going to be on this podcast with a bigger audience, in my mind, my brain was freaking out like that is dangerous, abort mission, maybe we just don't have the seven-figure goal, maybe we just stay here, it's fine, you're making multiple six-figures, that's the dream.

And so that's what had been coming up for me. I think we'll talk about this a little bit more about how use of the model comes into play here, but I think a big part for me of why I was able to navigate through that and probably will continue to is I can really shift into compassion for my brain. Because for me, one of the questions you have on the list is like, how much of this is

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really about cancel culture and how much of it is just our own fear of social rejection, people’s opinions.

And I mean, definitely for me I could probably just say that that’s what it was, but I could have so much compassion for my brain because I can also say that really makes sense. I remember when I was way younger and I had a really heavy accent because Spanish was my first language, I remember the racial slurs and even being beat up for that being something different and the things like, go back to Mexico, that kind of thing.

So I can have so much compassion for my brain for why it actually makes sense that my brain thinks it’s scary for me to be seen, for me to be heard. And anyway, the reason for me, why even though my brain’s like, why are we going to do this again, be on the podcast is because I’m pretty certain that I’m not the only one and if I share something that I have learned from navigating the fear of being canceled, then I will do that, I will share.

Kara: That brings up two really important things. It is definitely something I want to touch on because I do think part of what goes on in the online accountability discourse is that so many things get mixed up in it that are really separate issues.

And one of them is for those of us who already are people pleasers or socialized to fear other people’s opinions, or fear rejection, now we’re just taking all of those feelings, assigning them to “cancel culture” and then saying that cancel culture causes them, as though if this online accountability process or discourse didn’t exist, we wouldn’t worry what people thought of us.

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As if without Instagram, we wouldn't be worried about putting ourselves out there. And that's obviously just not true. We were worried about that before Instagram. So that doesn't mean that there aren't things to critique about some of the ways the processes go on, but I do think there's this conflation happening of I'm scared of what other people think, so that must be because cancel culture is real and bad.

As opposed to like, well, I'm definitely just scared of what other people think and that may or may not have anything to do with online accountability processes or calls for that. They're just separate things.

Brenda: Which was the case for me. I mean, this is super fun too. It's been so worth it to navigate that number one because I feel like I'm in a place where I have my own back harder than ever. Yeah, people can have opinions and I will be probably, will be judged the more and more that I put my message out there. Example, she's a weight loss coach so there's no way she's a feminist. Just a small example.

Kara: Not personal. Just a hypothetical example that...

Brenda: Totally hypothetical. But that was one of my biggest - I'm going to be canceled by anti-weight loss people or whatever. Just an example. Again, not hypothetical, maybe hypothetical. But through navigating that, I can also say it was definitely barfy and again, it's definitely going to be probably a process. In this past month, I've doubled my revenue.

Kara: I was about to tell you to tell everybody that.

Brenda: It's so fun.

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Kara: She means literally double. She’s had a month that is double what her previous highest month was.

Brenda: Yes. It’s blowing my mind and I know that this is just the beginning and it’s because again, I mean yeah of course that’s really fun, it’s really fun to have that breakthrough but number one, the most priceless thing for me is how solid I have my back because I did that work of people could “cancel,” have opinions, and me actually being okay with that.

Kara: Which is what allows you to show up as more and more of yourself, which is what grows your business. Because it’s you.

Brenda: I mean, this is what I would observe my brain doing so much is assuming that everyone will hate me and cancel me and then turns out actually, if you’re just yourself people might actually just like you.

Kara: Our brains are like, that’s definitely not an option. I’m curious - there was something else you said that I want to come back to but now I’ve also forgotten it and I want to hear what Amber and Brig think about this so we’ll come back to it. But I’m curious both, either if something from what Brenda said you want to weigh in on or if you just want to share why you were interested in talking about this.

Brig: Yeah, I’ll go. Mine was similar to Brenda. I think that was our Slack thing was I was saying how for me, it was very personal too about not wanting to show up as the coach for high-achieving Black women because I thought I needed all this education and African American history studies and all of this in order to say I coach high-achieving Black women.

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And so just that fear as Brenda was saying of saying the wrong thing and oh, she didn't read that book, or all of the stuff. So it was that fear of just not being accepted or being canceled. But for me it was more fueled by when I started doing the thought, “Thank god I'm a life coach,” sometimes it helps.

Kara: Once in a while.

Brig: All the time really. But when I really sat with it, I was like, oh, because there's this thought that if I'm not accepted by other cultures, my own culture, to be canceled by my own culture is the kiss of death. And so that fear was like, oh, and I was like, oh, that's the thought that's creating it, which is that intense visceral fear that Brenda was saying. To be canceled by people who look like you and that's your safe haven, because you have thoughts like when I go out I don't belong, if I can't belong in my own community, then where is - if I get kicked off the island, there's not another island to go to.

It's like, this is our island, but I look at other cultures like, oh, you get kicked off the island, there's other islands for you to go to. I was like, my mind is really making this really dramatic thing. As if I didn't create the island in the first place and then I realized I create my belonging wherever I go, so in whichever culture I'm in, I create my belonging.

So for me, it was more about sharing that experience of how when we create our own belonging, that cancel culture thing, that fear is less. I've experienced it a whole lot less because I say some stuff and I know people have lots of thoughts about some of the shit I say.

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Kara: As they have to. If you're saying stuff that nobody has any thoughts about, what are you saying? Happy Mother's Day? People even have thoughts about that. You shouldn't wish people happy mother's day, some people don't have mothers. Like, there's nothing you could say that nobody will have thoughts about.

But I think your point about that in-group is so true because for me, I was never afraid of judgment from - yeah, if the men's rights activists want to come out and yell at me, who gives a shit, right? But other feminists, what are all the other feminists going to think? That's who I'm afraid of judging me. That's who I'm afraid of whatever.

And I do think for me, definitely sense of belonging but as a social justice activist, obviously I was pretty familiar with the idea that social justice movements are diverse and complicated. And then I came into life coaching and I just, I don't know, all my past knowledge fell out of my brain.

And I was sort of back in this like, there's a right way and a wrong way, and somebody is going to disagree with me and then there's going to be an online process of some kind, whatever. And I think the peace for me has been similar to what I think both of you are saying, but that sort of complexity that we talk about in the advanced certification all the time, the whole idea is like, your original life coaching training is a little bit black and white and now how can we develop the complexity.

And the truth that there's no right way to be a feminist. So for sure some people are going to be upset with what I say, and we both have very deeply held convictions about what this word means and what the movement is and how it should work, and there's always going to be that disagreement.

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But I think that point about who we're worried about "canceling" us or not liking us or whatever is that in-group. None of us are upset I don't think if Fox News was going to like - if Fox News went after me, I'd be like, awesome free publicity, thank you. Not concerned.

Other than that maybe there's a lot more gun owners than in my population. But not concerned because they're not my in-group. But if Ms. Magazine did a profile on the toxicity of Kara Loewentheil's feminism or something, I would have a lot more self-coaching to do.

Brig: Exactly, yeah, totally.

Kara: What about you Amber?

Amber: Yeah, I'm definitely in line in what Brenda and Brig both said, and as they were talking, what came to me was the fear of being marginalized more because it's not necessarily getting canceled like Brig said, there's another island that you can go to.

But to be a marginalized person, and then to lose the in-group is a whole 'nother fear. And for me personally, coming out as a coach for Black women, create space for Black women and saying I'm a Black experience coach, I was scared of the whole flashback of Black isn't a monolith, everybody isn't the same, how can you say that. And it's just like, that's not what I'm saying.

Kara: It's not the Black monolith experience coach.

Amber: No, I'm just trying to create space for people that traditionally don't have spaces created for them. And with that you could bring a ton of stuff

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that I have no idea about but because I'm a life coach, I'll be able to help you through it and coach you on it, and I definitely had to do a lot of self-coaching and understanding where my fear was.

And I think some of it was a fear of rejection, but another part of it that I think comes with the cancel culture is that when actual celebrities or public figures are canceled, they lose resources, they lose opportunities, they lose money. And just kind of that swift and public stripping of everything was a big fear. But I think it's important to talk about the difference between regular people - I know we're all awesome people but we don't have any...

Kara: Are you saying we're not like George Clooney level?

Amber: We don't have that many eyes on us and one of the big - are we allowed to say real people's names on here?

Kara: Sure. I mean, I think so. I have no legal responsibility for anything anybody else is about to say. Go ahead.

Amber: One of the things that comes to mind for cancel culture is R. Kelly and how for him, it had to be a movement that people are like, stop playing his music, stop celebrating this man, stop giving him money because he is using to it abuse underage women and...

Kara: Of age.

Amber: Of age. So to remove his resources so he can stop being a predator. That is cancel culture and that's where I think, I don't know, the good part of it was trying to hold people accountable, trying to use the

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masses, use social media, use people’s knowledge to remove somebody from power.

But then I think now people use it as a word to kind of escape accountability in a lot of times, like oh, I’m being canceled. It’s like no, you’re being called out or called in or whatever. What you did was wrong and you should know that.

And I think there’s a difference. I’m not being afraid of being told I’ve done something wrong. I fuck up all the time. Tell me so I can fix it or even we can have a conversation about it, maybe I stand my ground, or whatever. But I think that’s different than a full cancelation of the resource removal.

Kara: Yeah. I feel like that’s such an important point and one of the things I want us to talk about, which is what’s the origin of this practice is you could think of it as - I can’t remember where I saw this and I don’t want to steal an idea without crediting but also I don’t know if it’s actually one person’s idea.

But vertical. It’s like people without power trying to call somebody with a lot of power and resources to account for behavior. So it’s not like, if Brenda has a problem with me, that’s a more of an interpersonal accountability issue, as opposed to the whole genesis of the practice is supposed to be from communities who feel like they don’t have a voice and don’t have a way to get accountability, and people are getting away with harming them over and over and over, to have some kind of extra legal mechanism to try to create that kind of justice.

But then something’s gone haywire, either in our brains or in the culture, when what that turns into is Brenda thinking that she can’t talk about her own ethnic and racial background because she’ll get canceled for being too

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Latina or you guys feeling like you're going to get canceled for being not Black in the right ways, or I'm just interested in what you guys think about that because it does feel to me like we've taken something that made sense in one context - one option would be yes, it's actually being used in this different way that isn't as productive.

One option is no, it's mostly just our thoughts. That's the whole we're just taking all of our fear and attaching it to that. So I don't know, I'm just curious what you think. Because I don't participate in a lot of online social justice, I feel like I'm only aware of the big more public ones like Rachel Hollis, very high-profile person. People are trying to call her to account in this particular way.

But then I also know there are other communities where there's a lot of what I would call more horizontal stuff, where people are calling in or calling out or asking for accountability processes from other people in their community who don't have big followings and it's more of an inter-community thing.

Anyway, I don't know, that was really not a well-formed question. I'm just curious what if any thoughts you guys have about the differences between a group of people trying to get accountability from a very public resourced figure who's causing material harm, versus sort of maybe the more horizontal someone who's not that big or doesn't have a big following or because they don't like the language they're using, or they heard about something they did in their interpersonal life, something that happened in a romantic relationship that a third person thinks is abusive, or I'm curious if you guys have any thoughts about if there are differences between the ways these processes are operating kind of.

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Brig: Yeah. I was going to say when it's more horizontal, I think what I see is the thing of like, it's different thoughts, and sometimes we just have different thoughts. Same intention, different thoughts. So therefore it's going to look differently, but the call out then feels so primal and the fear of the call out because you have different thoughts or different approach to something is like you're saying, in a social justice movement and any other movement, we all will have different thoughts about it.

As a culture, what we're saying is we're all supposed to think the same, then all we do is keep creating the same culture. So there is a place for us to think differently and to have different thoughts and to not go with the flow of things. And so within the horizontal thing, I may not agree with how you do it, but does that demand a call out or cancel? I think that's where it is.

That fear of I can't even say a different thought that may go against you because then you will use your resources to cancel me. I think that's where it is - we get to own who we are and we get to own and understand that we create our own resources. That's where you add the life coaching back into it and accepting is no, I create my own value, I create my own belonging, but you have to do that work in order to do that.

Kara: Yeah. I think that's why it's so complex and why I hate the discourse around it being so simplified. Because on the one hand it wouldn't make any sense for us as coaches to be like, okay, when you try to tell your partner how they have to take out the trash, you're trying to control them, it's not going to work, but when you want to tell a stranger on the internet what they have to think, that totally will work and you should go do it.

There's some level of that, like you can't control other people. But they're also not all the same. R. Kelly is up here and maybe Rachel Hollis is in the middle, and then there's people like - I mean, it brings up for me so many

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philosophical questions like, what is harm? What is violence? What are we describing as harm and violence? Who gets to decide that?

We may have different opinions of it. I think about this with myself. I think this is such an interesting thought experiment for us to do. If I think a man - and I'm picking an example where I'm the marginalized community. If I think a straight cis man, something he's said or done is sexist, and he disagrees, am I always 100% right because I'm a woman?

Some of that is the logic inherent in some of these conversations I think, and I don't know. Objectively I want to say no, subjectively in any given example I'm like, well, who knows better? Me or you? If you're being sexist, probably me.

So I understand that impulse, but I do think these are the questions that if we want to grapple with this stuff, honestly we have to grapple with, I have an opinion about how somebody else is thinking, talking, or acting.

Brig: Right. And of course as life coaches we know that's what you're going to see. That's what you're going to see and that's what you're going to find evidence for.

Kara: What's the source of my authority on that? Who gets to decide that? Should it be me and what is that based on? Is it based on my identity? Is it based on my experience? Is it based on my education? Is it based on my logic? I feel like these are the deeper questions that we have to grapple with because none of us on this call want to be like, so there should be no such thing as accountability for whatever anybody does.

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That’s obviously not where we are. And yet it also can’t be quite right that any time anybody has a thought that somebody else needs to be accountable to them because they have a disagreement, that also can’t be right either. So there has to be a more complicated conversation in the middle, but that’s what I feel like we’re not having. Did you want to say something Brenda? I think you were trying to get in before.

Brenda: Yeah, just to add to what you are already saying there. So for me, as a woman of color and because we’re talking about accountability culture/cancel culture. I mean, from where I’m sitting, I could see it both ways. I could see it in multiple ways. I could see how it’s so not useful for me as a woman of color and all the fears that I’m having and I could just see how that’s not useful at all.

And honestly, I’m just thankful that I have tools to navigate through it. And so with the coaching, we are so big on that individual empowerment and liberation by being able to have awareness of your own mind. So I think for me, I’m kind of seeing that this is probably I feel where it’s going to come down to each person being aware in that individual situation that you may be in.

Is this my own fears and fears of people’s opinions, et cetera? But on that same note, at the same time, again, myself as a woman of color and if you identify with any marginalized community, I could also see the benefit of having something like that as a tool in the way you were describing it because it is true that there are power dynamics in various communities. I’ve observed that. Of course it’s all our own thoughts, but also - I mean, I think everyone on this call agrees that there are power dynamics.

Kara: Right, of course. And that there’s also harm that happens that there aren’t any kind of institutional or structural channels to deal with or that

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don't work. So whether it's R. Kelly or I mean, I think about Harvey Weinstein wasn't so much canceled as arrested.

But people sort of committing harms over and over that a community knows about that there's no way to do anything about, or people who are stealing intellectual property or labor from different communities, like white women stealing intellectual property from Black women, and like, well, are you going to take them to copyright court?

There isn't necessarily any kind of formal infrastructure for it. So there is this very I think populist social movement element like, we have to come up with our own forms of accountability and our own forms of trying to mobilize against oppressive power.

So it's like obviously I think all of us agree that there's value in that and it's important in some ways. And then it's just like, but is that what's happening? Is there a way to separate different things that are happening? It's just so fascinating that it's become such a bogey man for so many people.

And the other thing I want us to talk about as coaches is what's the psychological part behind all this. I think there's like, you can't understand the phenomenon without understanding why it feels good for people to participate in a public accountability process.

Not the leaders, but all the people who then join it. Why does that feel so good to us? Because you have to understand you're getting a hit of dopamine from participating and what's going on there. So I'm curious if you guys have thoughts about that.

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Amber: Yeah, I think for me part of that disagreement in where people get their kicks from it is you did something that I didn't like and I need to call you out, I need to hold you accountable for whatever so that I can feel better. And as coaches, we know that that isn't the case. We don't need anybody else to do or say anything to make us feel better.

But for the masses, it's - I don't know if I want to say self-love, but it's a way to - I don't even know if I want to say this either but have your own back to call somebody out. Because in that moment it makes you feel better about what you have going on.

Kara: Yeah, it makes you feel powerful I think. That you are taking this action, that you're participating, and I think I can speak to - from the white woman perspective, I think there's so much internalized and undealt with shame and guilt around white supremacy and complicity in white supremacy that people do not deal with in productive ways.

And then this becomes a way to feel better about that. It's like all of that gets channeled into this process. So it's sort of like a form of - a virtue signaling is a dismissive term, but I really don't mean it that way. As a coach I understand what's happening.

People are just like, terrified and rejecting themselves all the time and shaming themselves and then projecting that onto other people and then trying to - the truth is when you're "virtue signaling," you're just signaling to yourself. You're the person you're trying to reassure that you're an okay person. It's all just you.

But I think there's that - we can't understand this without understanding that humans are pack animals and there's a hit of dopamine that comes from

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participating in a big group event where it's like a concert, except that there's very different consequences.

But there's a reason that - I hesitate to talk about this because I am not saying that an online accountability process is the same as a mob, and I think people who are against any of this use the phrase mob mentality, and that's like a reductive phrase. But it's also blind to pretend that there isn't a physiological, psychological thing that happens to people when they all get to band together and act against a “common enemy.”

That's how humans have evolved and that feels good to us. And I feel like we can't understand what's going on without that. And I do think maybe as I'm talking about it, it's like our society feels now so fragmented and like online is this weird space where we don't have those physical communities anymore in the same ways, especially the last year or two. And now those communities are coalescing and forming online like around these processes, as opposed to whatever they would be about in real life.

Brig: Yeah, I think the other part of it is - and you mentioned it with the dopamine hit is for the individual that is afraid of being canceled, like people like me, Brenda, Amber, like we talked about is to remember that that cynic part of the dopamine hit. See, I told you so, hit, see, safe, don't do it. We see it and your brain is like, see, I told you that happened.

There is that part of see, a dopamine hit even with that. I told you that was not safe and there you see it and you see an example of it like with the Rachel Hollis thing and you get the little hit of dopamine also with that. To be aware of the dopamine hits is important and where it's coming from. Like oh, okay that's just my body doing a physiologic thing also.

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Kara: Yeah. Because I think we take it to mean I'm doing something righteous, that's why this feels good. And it feels good because it's caused by your thoughts. You could totally decide to believe you're doing something righteous on purpose. But we would always tell a client just because you get a hit of dopamine, that doesn't mean anything about the moral content of the thing you're doing.

You get a hit of dopamine from, I don't know, smoking a pack of cigarettes. It doesn't necessarily mean it's good for you. It doesn't necessarily mean it's moral in any way, positive or negative. It's just a neutral thing. So I do think to understand more about what's happening in my body when I see this happening, when I'm afraid of it, when I want to participate in it, whatever, and what's going on. And that doesn't mean it's bad. It's just something we should be aware of so we're making more informed decisions I think.

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That was such a rich and juicy conversation and we're not done yet. This podcast episode when we recorded it was so fascinating and rich and important and long. And so we've cut it in half. This was the first half and you will be hearing the second half, the follow-up to this conversation next week.

So if listening to this you feel like you have questions, there are things we haven't discussed or resolved yet, totally right. There's more to discuss and we will be discussing all of it next week. Same time, same place, back here on the podcast. We will have part two of this episode. See you then.

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