

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Kara Loewentheil and Simone Seol

[Outside the White Box with Kara Loewentheil and Simone Seol](#)

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Welcome to Outside the White Box: Elevating the Coaching Conversation. Your podcast with two life coaches who have Ivy League educations and vaguely remember some of what they learned. This podcast is deeper than a Tumblr post, but nothing approaching a PhD dissertation.

I'm Simone Seol. I'm Kara Loewentheil and we're two life coaches who think that the life coaching industry could use a little bit of an intellectual glow-up, but we do not claim to be experts in anything other than the coaching. Don't @ us with any actual expertise. Keep your actual expertise to yourselves please. We hope you enjoy.

Kara: So today, we're starting off with a pop quiz, Can You Name Where This Comes From? I'm going to read a quote, and you all think about, "What does this sound like to you?" "Mind in the master power that molds and makes, and man is mind, and evermore he takes the tool of thought and shaping what he wills, brings forth a thousand joys, a thousand ills. He thinks in secret, and it comes to pass. Environment is but his looking glass."

Simone: If you guessed Brooke Castillo, you're wrong.

Kara: Right. This sounds like if somebody had given us an assignment of old-timey poetry about what we teach in coaching, but in fact it is from a book called As a Man Thinketh, by James Allen, published in 1903. And he called it a "book on the power and right application of thought." And he says that, "Each man holds the key to every condition, good or bad, that enters into his life. And by working patiently and intelligently upon his thoughts, he may remake his life and transform his circumstances." Does this sound familiar?

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Simone: That was before the World War I.

Kara: Yeah. Before some of the events. I mean I think probably, though, other things had already happened in history that seemed like maybe they weren't created by people's thoughts, but who knows.

Simone: Yeah.

Kara: So we wanted to start with that because on this episode, we're going to talk about the intellectual history of some of the concepts that we use in modern coaching and where they came from. And some of those, I think, will sound more well known. We're going to talk about meditation and some Eastern spiritual traditions and the Ancient Greeks, but I think less surfaced is this American history from the turn of the century and starting in 1900, even the late 1800s.

And there's so many strands we could pull into those. There were what were called charismatic teachers and preachers who went across the country having these revival-type events that were often Christian in nature but where they were claiming to heal people by laying hands on and helping people to achieve their best selves.

And I just love that this poem, I guess you would call it, this rhyme in the front of his book, encapsulates so much of what we teach. But I would guess that if we polled all the life coaches we know, maybe one other has ever heard of this book and doesn't know that so much of what we teach comes from this book that most of us have never even heard of.

Simone: Are you speaking just in terms of ideas or do you know of actual lineage where this person inspired whatever... Who inspired...

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Kara: Yeah. No, I wish I could have found it when I was looking for this book. I read a fascinating article once about the origin of so much self-help literature in this book, but I can't currently trace the genealogy.

Simone: Yeah.

Kara: And, of course, he didn't make all this shit up, either. Some of these ideas have been around for centuries, right?

Simone: Yeah.

Kara: But I do think we think of self-help as this very modern phenomenon, and particularly gendered, for women. Whereas this book, not written for women. Written for men. I just read this whole fascinating New Yorker article about the evolution of home economics and the writing of books for women on how to become better housewives and how that influenced the development of self-help. There's just so many fascinating influences. And so in our normal way, we're just going to chaotically talk about the ones that come to our minds.

Simone: I just want to say, we might want to come back to this point later because it's not really central to what we're talking about today. But I love that the United States, America, is where all of this development of self-help blossomed in the 20th century. And of course, there are aspects to it that we want to critically interrogate but also...

Kara: That's what nerds call a good time. I left academia so I would never have to critically interrogate anything the rest of my life.

Simone: Just wanted to give you a little flashback to Yale.

Kara: I'm just going to be in the corner with my PTSD right now.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Simone: Right. So there are parts of it that we want to question, but I love that... Was this James Allen guy American, I'm assuming? Right?

Kara: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Simone: Yeah. Yeah. And there were the revivalists and then there were all these... I can't remember all the names, but America is where these...

Kara: Oh, wait, I lied. He wasn't American.

Simone: Oh. British?

Kara: He was British.

Simone: Okay.

Kara: I totally lied.

Simone: Anglo-American. Okay. That actually kind of undermines my point, but not really.

Kara: That's okay. Let's just pretend it didn't.

Simone: Yeah. I think the reason that there was so much self-help developing in the 20th century in America was because there was genuinely more opportunity in 20th century America than anywhere else ever before, sort of just in general. Yes, of course, there are a lot of caveats. There weren't the same opportunities for Black people as white people, et cetera, et cetera.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

But there was a time when it just seemed like anything was possible for humanity, and that sense was more palpable in the U.S. than anywhere else, and that was very real and very thrilling. And I kind of feel like it's not about America, but I feel like it's about what's possible for humanity as a whole and what happens when a society prospers. And it gets people really thinking about what we can create not out of necessity with our human brains and our human lives but with our pure creative potential.

And I think self-help is really about when we - sure, some of it is about how to survive, but when you go beyond that, what do you want to create with your life. What do you want to create with your human ingenuity and out of your will and out of your values and I think it was a blessing that we had this robust American tradition of it. Of course, not exclusively American, et cetera, et cetera. But I just celebrate it as both an American and not American. I think I'm sort of both. But with the critical interrogation bits, I think it's worth celebrating.

Kara: I have to read you some of the other titles he wrote because these just sound like things that we would purchase at a life coaching conference. Some of them are a little more Christian, especially there's Byways of Blessedness is not one that I would pick up.

But, The Life Triumphant, Mastering the Heart and Mind; Morning and Evening Thoughts; The Mastery of Destiny; Above Life's Turmoil; From Passion to Peace; Eight Pillars of Prosperity; Man: King of Mind, Body, and Circumstance; Light on Life's Difficulties; Foundation Stones to Happiness and Success. These are all a hundred percent sound like exactly what we would expect to find now.

Simone: Yeah.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Kara: I think for me, you're always the more cheerful and uplifting of two us. I, too, celebrate what we can achieve as humans. I think the reason for me, even though - God, do I never want to use the phrase "critically interrogate" anything again for the rest of my life. So let me put it this way. I think for some people like, "If this works, it works. And that's all I need to know." I feel that way in terms of when we get to the ultimate unprovability of certain things that we teach in coaching, I do feel like I'm like, "Listen. I don't know, but it works. I've tried it, it works. That's good enough for me."

But I think to the extent that we want to, as we keep talking about, provide ways of thinking and solutions for people that engage with the complicated nature of reality and the thornier questions of our times, that it's important to understand that the ideas that we teach and the ideas that we use didn't arise in a vacuum. Right?

And weren't created necessarily by the person who just taught them to you. And to understand their intellectual - I mean, I think this is our circumstances shape what we think. I'm saying this as, number one, a Jew, which is like a group of people who have textbooks going back 6000 years where we argue about literally every spot of ink on the original Dead Sea Scrolls, and two, my father's a rare book dealer, so always very interested in provenance.

I think understanding where our ideas came from helps us see what they might not be accounting for, in a way. It's like we don't even know what to look for if we think that they are... Like, no idea's universal, right? It's just a thought, and people have many different ones. And I think understanding that background helps us understand how what we're talking about may resonate with some people and not resonate with others and why. Right?

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Like this example I keep using of saying that there's a divine ordination of perfection in the universe. Going to super resonate with some clients. Really not going to resonate with other clients. And if you understand, "Oh, well, this is a very Christian concept, and it's based on this theology, and it's not going to resonate, maybe, with people who grew up in a different kind of community," that makes you just a more effective coach, in my opinion, to understand that what we teach and our coaching principles are not just true statements from...

Simone: I think these are all hypotheses that we play with, I think.

Kara: Yeah.

Simone: All our coaching ideas, we're not positing any of them as the absolute truth of the universe. That's not our job. But we're like, "Let's play with this hypothesis, see where it gets us." Right?

Kara: Yeah.

Simone: And so I think this is a good time to jump in with our beloved hypothesis of "your thoughts create your results." Right? And I think people want to rebel against idea when they don't treat it as a hypothesis and just start playing with it.

Kara: They think it's like an edict or a rule that's being handed down.

Simone: Exactly. And that is not, I don't think, anybody's intention that I have been taught by.

Kara: Yeah. Totally.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Simone: Anyhow. So at the same time, if you do want to rebel against it, it'll probably come as a relief to learn that this is not a universal idea, and it was - you can tell me where, if you want to poke holes in how I'm seeing, how I'm painting the picture. But it was sort of ignoring the pre-Christian history of Europe because that was too long ago.

I think the idea that our thoughts are the primary driver of shaping our reality and creating the results in our reality was really able to take root. And it's like Renaissance humanism when we wrestled our understanding of reality and ourselves as human beings back from religion, back from this idea of, "You are nothing, God controls everything, and the best you can do as a human being is try to live in God's grace and do what the church tells you," essentially.

And so the idea that your cognitive function, meaning your thoughts, have anything to do with reality, it probably starts from like, "Okay, let's take that sort of decentralize the church's authority, what the church is thinking in Europe, and then let's put the human at the center first." Not first, but again. And that was sort of the whole point of the Renaissance and the intellectual component of the Renaissance. And then we have the Enlightenment thinkers, the Descartes's famous, "I think, therefore I am." That's very much a coaching idea.

Kara: If you were to distill all of thought work coaching into one sentence, it would be, "I think, therefore I am."

Simone: Exactly. And at the time, that was - you've heard that a million times. But it was very subversive and revolutionary. And it was quite scandalous at the time because everybody was like, "No, God created you, therefore you are."

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Kara: Right.

Simone: And Descartes was like, "What if it's just my cognition." And so before that, all of European history, people would not have agreed at all. They would have found it very heretical and wrong and inaccurate that your thoughts have anything to do with anything. Right?

Simone: And that's just European Western intellectual history and not even going into other parts of the world. But I just wanted to start with that.

Kara: Yeah, and I think you can keep tracing it, right? You get to the Enlightenment - I feel like we should always preface this with being like, "We don't have PhDs in this. This is just two overly educated people who are also coaches."

Simone: But trying to remember what they learned in college 20 years ago.

Kara: It's like Drunk History, but for life coaching. Except those people are actually experts who get drunk, and we're sober people who are not experts. But, you know, we got a lot of degrees between us. It counts for something.

But so you're right. Then you get to the Enlightenment, and you've got that emphasis on not just the individual but also the idea that personal fulfillment is something that anyone should give a shit about. Right?

Simone: Right.

Kara: This is not a thing that has been true throughout history or even is true in all cultures today. The idea that the purpose of being alive is to express your individual self as much you can is a very historically and

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

culturally contingent belief. It's Western and it's not even Western forever. It's Western since, I don't know, 1750. I don't know. When do we date the Enlightenment to? I'm terrible with dates. Much better with concepts.

But that idea in the Enlightenment that individual happiness, who cares about that? This is a new thing that we're going to care about our individual human happiness. And then you fast forward a little bit, but I think that, you know, if you haven't taken the history of psychology, you wouldn't think about this, but our whole idea of a self is just an idea that is built on, I guess, maybe starting back in the Renaissance but then strongly Enlightenment work and then Enlightenment philosophy, and obviously we're jumping over big swaths of intellectual development, and then modern psychology. Before Freud, nobody was talking about the unconscious. He's the one who - Is Freud the one who talks about the conscious?

Simone: Yeah.

Kara: I just like any psychological concept from the turn of the century. I'm like, "Meh, probably Freud."

Simone: You're probably right.

Kara: And I feel, like, probably Jung and William James and everybody are turning over in their graves. But that one I find such a brain breaker. It's so fascinating. I feel like that we are so deeply inculcated in that idea of having a self, a psychological self, that trying to imagine living life without that idea, I don't even think I can. I can't break my brain that hard to imagine what is it like to be a human who has no idea that there is a self in that way or has no idea that there is any psychology that exists.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Simone: I think it's not... Okay, I'm going to try to take a crack at this because I don't think it's that you don't have an awareness of yourself, because I don't know if that's possible. But it's more of your understanding of yourself as an individual versus your understanding of yourself as part of a whole. Right?

Kara: I think it's the idea that you even have a coherent psychological identity in self is an invented concept that not everyone always had. That's my understand of - this is the thing, right? It's hard for us to even imagine. It's like when we talk about romantic love being invented. Did people before that feel feelings in their bodies?

Simone: Like hormones? Yeah.

Kara: Not just hormones, but emotions. Did people feel feelings in their body. They were like, "When I'm around this person, this feels really great." Sure.

Simone: Right, right, right.

Kara: But the idea is how deeply our experience of it is constructed by the categories we have to put it in of like, "What is this thing?" "I have this feeling. What is it?" And then there's this whole huge background that comes with that thing once we've named it based on everything we've been raised to think about it.

Simone: It's like how the word "psychology" did not exist until a couple centuries ago.

Kara: Right.

Simone: That totally checks out, that the idea of the self is constructed.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Kara: Right. It's not like nobody ever talked about thoughts before.

Simone: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Kara: But this whole - so I think to me, all of this actually really helps me with the radical subjectivity that I think good coaching requires. Right? Because I'm like, "It's all made up."

Simone: Right.

Kara: What would I have thought if I was born in the Judean deserts 2000 years ago. I have no idea. I wouldn't have had the idea of the self in the same way. I wouldn't have had the idea of psychology in the same way. I wouldn't have had the same ideas about family, love, whatever. But I think one of the things that we talked about that I want us to talk about here is it's not just contemporary, but it's also Western.

And so when you are coaching, if you are coaching somebody who's from a different background, whether it's ethnic or racial or religious or whatever else, a community where individualism is much less prized than collectivism - I have this in The Clutch all the time. It's very jarring to all of a sudden be told that what matters most is your individual thoughts, that you are a sole organism that is operating in this thought-result loop and creating things in the world.

Simone: Yeah.

Kara: I thought those of us raised in that mindset, even if you weren't raised with thought work, if you're raised in a Western, individualistic mindset, it's hard to even wrap your brain around how much that doesn't really make sense to somebody who is not raised in that background.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Simone: Yeah. It differs based on the linguistic frames that you use as well. Something that I like to tell my friends about is in the Korean language, we don't have - when I describe things that belong to me or that are my possessions, we have the word for "my." That is a word that exists. But we rarely describe things as belonging to "me." We describe things as belonging to "us," even though it doesn't belong to other people, it belongs to you. Even if I'm an only child and I'm referring to my mother, I won't say "my mother," I'll say, "our mother."

And so when this understanding of the world in which nothing really belongs to you, you as an isolated individual is not really that important. You are nothing outside of the community, outside of the familial-social unit, when you come from that cultural atmosphere, then, yeah, the Western individualism is going to be very jarring.

And, yeah, I completely agree. To be aware-aware, it shows up in coaching. And not to say that it's wrong or bad, but like we said earlier, this is one hypothesis, this is one way of looking at the world, one way a lot of people experience the world. And other people experience it differently.

Kara: Yeah, and not to necessarily to a Western mind, somebody basically who doesn't see as much distance between them and the community or them and other people for whom that's not a very clear identity line. To a Western mind, that's like, "There's something wrong." Like you need to be coached out of that.

Simone: Exactly.

Kara: Problems with boundaries. Right?

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Simone: Yeah.

Kara: To a Western-trained, if you're not reflecting on it, mind, that can be seen almost as a pathology or as though you need to be coached to be more individualistic or you need to be coached to focus more on yourself and not care whatever is happening with other people.

Simone: Yeah.

Kara: That's taken it to be in a Western society as an obvious value.

Simone: Right.

Kara: But that's not objective. All these terms are all made up. And that's not necessarily where you client maybe wants to go.

Simone: And I have to also insert this example, too, although this is not a podcast about Korean language and culture. I remember having a conversation with a friend in college where I was telling her about how Korea works, and I was telling her that people - for example, I have a father and a mother, and nobody in my life calls my father by his name or my mother by his name.

They will all call my father, for example, Simone's father. Or my mother will be Simone's mother. And a lot of humans in this society are called not by the name that they were given, but by their relationship to their family members or other people or institutions in their lives.

So names are used a lot less frequently than by our markers of association of where we stand in community. And I know that it's similar in this part of the world, in East Asia. I actually think that it is similar in other cultures as

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

well that are further away that I don't know for sure specifically, so I can't say. But I said this to that friend, and that friend said, kind of responded like, "Oh, that's so sad," like people don't get to be individual.

Kara: They don't have their identity.

Simone: Exactly.

Kara: If you don't have your individual identity, tragedy.

Simone: Yeah, like your mom's not her own person - I went Wellesley. We were all feminists. It's like, "Oh, your mom's only defined by being your mother and she's not her own person." And I remember at the time being like, "Wait, what? That's not... Why? What?"

Kara: And also, it's everybody, so it's not just her. It would be one thing if the society was like, "Everybody has names except for moms."

Simone: Exactly.

Kara: "And they're just mom of so-and-so."

Simone: That'll be a problem, yeah.

Kara: That's a little different.

Simone: Yeah. And so I think - but there can be a little bit of very subtle, unconscious cultural shaming if you come from the kind of culture that I do, where it's like, "Wait, are we all just pathetic and unindividuated? Should we all be more white and Western and just insist that we are called by our names?"

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Kara: I made up my own name. I don't even have my family name.

Simone: Exactly. Right.

Kara: I just was born from the forehead of Zeus. Yeah. And I think that's so huge because so much of this coaching work, especially if you're coaching women or coaching other marginalized people and trying to help them develop that sense of identity and independence, to understand when that may not be welcome or when you just need to approach it differently. I think even just - by the time somebody comes up to The Clutch, they probably know that I'm talking about an individual self a lot, right? But that doesn't mean that they're not going to be wrestling with how to integrate that with however they've grown up or what they were taught. And being aware of that, I think, makes you more effective.

We teach our clients to question everything. That has to include questioning our own premises, even, about what is the goal of coaching, and where am I trying to help this person get, and what is functional versus dysfunctional, or healthy versus unhealthy, or any of that stuff.

So I know we wanted to also talk about speaking of differences between Western and Eastern, as huge generalizations, East Asian at least, communities. We also wanted to talk about meditation and thought work, and that whole genre. What is that... What?

Simone: Wait. Hold on. Which angle are you, because there's...

Kara: Yeah. I mean, that's an entire - meditation and thought work can be an entire, not just podcast series, but probably 17 PhDs.

Simone: Right.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Kara: I think that the thing that we've talked about is understanding where modern coaching is drawing from Eastern meditative tradition, sometimes without attribution, and how to reconcile - one of the thing's that weird about modern coaching is that - not weird. I mean, it's fascinating. But it brings a...

Simone: You have to critically interrogate it.

Kara: Critically interrogating. And I want to hear what you think about this, but one of things I had to struggle with, at least, having - because I actually - hardly an expert, but had studied meditation before I came to thought work. And it sort of borrows from some meditative traditions, I think, this sort of obviously observance of the thoughts but also non-identification of the thoughts and also unattachment on some level.

It's like, "Don't be attached to particular outcomes. Don't be attached to particular expectations. That suffering comes from that attachment." But then we're combining it with this very Western like, "And also you're an individual who should set big goals and achieve them and go out and go out and conquer things."

Simone: Yeah.

Kara: And that's an interesting marriage, right? Those are weird bedfellows, conceptually. And I have done my own wrestling with them, but I'm wondering how you think about them.

Simone: Hold on. So I don't remember if we had that conversation about how I hate meditation.

Kara: No, but let's talk about it. I mean, I'm...

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Simone: Okay. I will go on the record for the first time. I'm going to be brave and come out and say, "I hate meditation." It's not that I hate meditation. I hate the place that it takes up in our contemporary coaching world discourse. I don't think meditation is helpful for everybody.

Kara: Yeah, totally.

Simone: There are so many other more accessible ways to accomplish what meditation can accomplish. I think so many people beat themselves up because they can't get themselves to meditate in the correct way that whatever teacher prescribes.

Kara: Yeah.

Simone: And I think a lot of these things are happening, I think, because meditation as it is taught in Western society and - there's research studies on meditation now. And it's all fine, but it's sort of divorced from the context in which it's practiced and understood in a lot of these traditional lineages. Right?

Kara: Yeah.

Simone: So if a client comes to me and says, "I've been trying to meditate..." This is my personal agenda. I'd be like, "Fuck meditation. Go for a walk instead." This is a scientifically studied thing, but if you have certain, I don't want to call them brain conditions. If you're prone to certain...

Kara: Yeah, if you're an anxious-ruminative. If you have trouble with anxious and intrusive thoughts, but...

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Simone: Or if you have trauma.

Kara: Yeah. Meditation can worsen them.

Simone: Meditation can worsen them. And it can make people really feel like they're broken and defective because they can't do this thing that everybody says is so good for them.

Kara: Totally. When I found thought work, I was like, "Oh, this is why I can't really meditate." I had studied meditation and practiced it and it did sort of help in some ways.

Simone: Listen, if you love meditation, power to you. Keep doing what you love. But I'm sort of steeped in a very old traditional, Buddhist culture, and meditation is not prescribed by Buddhist teachers and monks to laypeople.

Kara: Right.

Simone: And there are meditative practices that are prescribed for you to work on your spirituality, but they all involve movement. They involve reading. They involve things that aren't just sitting still and trying not to scratch yourself where you itch.

Kara: And also, we're collapsing - there's so many different practices.

Simone: That's true, yeah.

Kara: For me, the kinds of meditation that I tended to find helpful were meditations that either involved active breathing practice, which gives you something to do, you're not just trying to watch your brain, or involved a lot of somatic awareness work, which as somebody who was always living in my head, was helpful.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

But first of all, obviously, we should've disclaimed this at the beginning. There's so many different kinds of meditative traditions. There's Buddhist meditation, there's Hindu forms of meditation. Jews have mystical meditation. All peoples. I think most peoples have had some kind of practice of you sit quietly and try to connect to whatever, and sometimes you have psychedelic experiences, and sometimes you hate it, and sometimes nothing happens, and sometimes you have breakthroughs, and whatever.

I agree with you but that part of what goes wrong is, especially with that decontextualization, I find half the people I know who are trying to meditate are completely confused about what's supposed to...

Simone: Exactly.

Kara: They think that they're supposed to be sitting silently and having a blank mind, which is not at all...

Simone: And achieving enlightenment.

Kara: Which is not at all what's supposed to happen. And my experience for sure was that, and for most of my clients, especially when they were all lawyers, was their brains were way too anxious and obsessive and ruminative for that to be helpful. And thought work was a way of teaching them the practice of observing and disidentifying from your thoughts without having to sit in meditation.

Simone: This is just a hypothesis I just came up with. I could be wrong, but this decontextualization that we're talking about, could it be that - I think secular meditation might be a kind of a new thing. I think for the most part

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

in most parts of the world where it was taught traditionally, it was probably a part of some spiritual context, right?

Kara: Definitely.

Simone: And so for Buddhism, for example, it's not meditation just to quiet your thoughts in which it's divorced from any kind of spiritual context. You are meditating within - the word "theological" is wrong, but it's like a Buddhist, spiritual context, right? There's the Buddha heart and then there's whatever. All the things.

And I love Christian meditative methods. Being a Christian, I think there's a rich history of it that a lot of people ignore. That, too, it's not just sitting still. You're praying or you're saying certain words or whatever, doing meditative things, but to connect to the heart of Christ, to hear God, to be in conversation with God. And I don't know anything about Jewish meditative practice, but it's all situated. But when you take the spiritual context away, I think that's when the confusion can start. "What's supposed to happen? What am I...?"

Kara: And you're not with a teacher or a spiritual leader who's really mentoring you and teaching you the process. But there's also...

Simone: It's divorced from lineage. Practice is divorced from lineage. Not that that is evil, but it can leave people having experiences that feel disembodied and weird. And they blame themselves, which is the biggest problem.

Kara: Right. They also just don't even understand what's supposed to happen.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Simone: Right.

Kara: I just felt lucky living in New York where there was - you could go to the Tibetan Buddhist Center and study under teachers who could give Dharma and who had a lineage. That was a different experience.

Simone: Those teachers are few and far in between, in my humble opinion. Teachers with actual legit lineage, that's just a thought. But anybody can proclaim to teach meditation. And I'm not against that. But it's just putting things in context.

Kara: Yeah. But I also think the whole reason that it has been possible for the Western world to decontextualize, especially Buddhist forms of meditation, is that from a Western perspective, you don't imagine apps built on Jewish meditation or on Muslim meditation or Christian meditation. But because in a very - I don't know what the word is for centering religions that have the concept of, I guess it's just Judaeo Christian or monotheistic.

In monotheistic religious framework, look at Buddhist practices and be like, "Well, that's not a religion. There's no Jesus. There's no God." There isn't this one dude who's the center of everything so we would see it as religious instead from a Christian religious standpoint that somehow, "Well, just, it's..." There's no... You see what I'm saying? It's easy to decontextualize because I think from a...

Simone: "Because there's not one dude." That's such a great point. We don't think it's a real religion unless there's one dude in the sky.

Kara: Right. They're like, "This isn't a religious practice. We can all do it."

Simone: It totally is.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Kara: It's not religious, it's just whatever. It's just like paying attention to your breath. That doesn't have anything to do with God because it's coming from this monotheistic religion that doesn't recognize other religions if they don't at least have, if not one god... You can have a lot of gods, maybe, but you got to have some kind of deity.

Simone: This is a whole other rant that I have but it's sort of Westerners regarding non-Western spiritual traditions as more benevolent and harmless just because, again, the absence of one dude in the sky.

Kara: Right.

Simone: And listen, Buddhism is not inherently, Hinduism not inherently more peaceful and enlightened just because of the absence of one dude. Humans are human everywhere.

Kara: Right. It's like the idea that women are just naturally gentler.

Simone: Yeah. Exactly. That's sexism, and in this context, it's Orientalism. It's like, "Oh, Buddhists, they're all just chill and peaceful." No, they're not. Buddhists get into wars with each other.

Kara: There's never been any violence or oppression in any country.

Simone: No. Asia, never happened.

Kara: In any Asian country. Okay. Do have any thoughts about - how do you reconcile, or maybe you don't think it needs to be reconciled, but this attempt to combine this very goal-oriented, in and of the world, like, "Let's make a lot of money. Let's set these kinds of goals. Let's lose weight. Let's make money. Let's whatever." This very, "Let's care a lot about what's

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

happening in our physical bodies and our material possessions and whatever."

So that I think of as the Western part of it. And then there's this sort of borrowing of - and not to say that obviously there are Western thinkers also who thought about the mind and non-attachment, but I do think the non-attachment observance of the thinking, non-identification with your thoughts. There are two different traditions that I do feel are trying to be smooshed together.

Simone: Here's the way I would put it is the difference between worldly, material, temporal preoccupation versus more transcendent, and that could either be Eastern transcendence, which is dis-identifying with your thoughts and your sense of self and ego and everything. Or it could be more Western transcendence where it's like, "Be in the Kingdom of Heaven instead of..." Well, that's Christian but you know...

Kara: Yeah. Totally.

Simone: So that's how I would characterize the sort of split/binary. And this is my very personal take is that - this is where all of my agenda comes back. I don't like when people, coaches, personally, when they use terms like "ascension" or like... It's like, "Where are we...?"

Kara: I don't think I've heard that, but that would end a consult call for me. "No thank you. We are not ascending."

Simone: I am way more into the woo than you are, so it's not like I'm against that concept but it's...

Kara: To me that just sounds so Christian. That just is like...

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Simone: It's Christian/new-agey.

Kara: Yeah. A lot of the new-age stuff pulls from Christianity.

Simone: Right, right, right. So it's kind of the idea that we are supposed to transcend our petty worldly concerns. I am a very spiritual, religious person, and I think we're put on Earth in these meat suits for a reason. I think we form societies and get into fights with each other and have sex and have babies and construct societies and have constructs for a reason.

And I think there is so much spiritual growth to be had from really engaging in the material worldly concerns. And so that's why I teach my own marketing students about what I call the benevolent bait and switch, which is you lure them in by telling them, "I'm going to help you lose weight. I'm going to help you make money." But then what you really sneak in is the inner growth, if you want to call it, the spiritual healing and the extension of all that.

And I think that they look like they're at odds, but they're not because we are both just skeleton and bones and meat, and we're just bodies, and we're of this world but we're also more than that. I think we are our brains but also - I don't know. There's a sense of, even if you're not a religious or a spiritual person, I think we can all agree that there is something mysterious about the universe that goes beyond our cognitive understanding, that goes beyond the day-to-day material concerns of our lives.

And we are connected to both worlds, and we are awake and sensate to both worlds, and I think I'm all for "live the heck out of this life." Make all the money, look however you want, have all the relationships you want, and do the work you want in the world but while also acknowledging that none of it

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

matters that much. At the end of the day, we're all going to die, and we can't take any of it with us.

So just having all of these pursuits not be so serious and taking it all as play and kind of, "Let's see what we can express with our human potential," rather than like, "I'm going to make this money and that's an end in itself." Do you know what I mean? That's sort of my personal take on it.

Kara: Yeah. I like that. That's interesting. That's obviously very different from mine because I'm not a religious person. I think I just come down in the end thinking probably there are some contradictions here, but can make it work. On some level I do think if you are working on a radical project of non-identification with your thinking that is at odds with some of the emphasis that we have on positive thoughts and positive self-regard and developing this positive identity and relationship with yourself where you love yourself and you're - in love, there's obviously long traditions of love and compassion and meditation.

Simone: I think that's the middle step. You can't go from self-loathing to complete transcendence. You have to go from self-loathing to not-loathing and then accepting yourself and then loving yourself. And once you have that relationship with yourself, then you can make decisions if you want to transcend that.

Kara: Yeah. But I also think obviously as you know in any religion, there's always this tension between the people who are like, "No. To have the highest religious expression, you have to be in a monastery, be in a nunnery, live in a cave."

Simone: Oh, yeah.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Kara: Just be devoted a hundred percent to the spiritual experience and not have any of these ties and attachments to the world, even though we all know that those people are all human. So they're all living together in a place there's going to be power intrigues and struggles and people having clandestine relationships and whatever's going on. Nobody's truly living just life of the mind.

I don't know. I don't find it problematic. I've come down clearly very firmly on like, "Well, I'm going to non-identify with my negative thoughts. I'm going to identify more with my positive thoughts." I think it's just interesting to think about, can these - in any given set of precepts you're living by, are they coherent? Do they make sense? And to some extent, one version of what the human experience and the self is is just a constant revising of thoughts to enable a false coherence about our experience to make everything seem to make sense and work together and make ourselves seem coherent and stable over time, even though that's not really true.

Simone: Every conversation we have for this podcast, I'm like, "There should have been 10 conversations."

Kara: I know. And we're like, "So, basically, your identity is all screwed up."

Simone: So there it is, intellectual history for you.

Kara: "Good-bye." Well, all we're trying to do is encourage people to have these conversations and to think about these things and not be...

Simone: Give yourself permission to ask these questions and stay with them and not have to - it's precious to be able to have this space in your brain to entertain more questions than you need to have the answers for.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

And to take all of the ideas that we talk about in coaching, not as dogma, but as, again, hypotheses.

One of my favorite people, thinkers, who's an astrologer, says, "Believe nothing. Entertain all possibility." And that's something that I really live by. And I think the more possibilities you can entertain as a coach is very important as a coach to be able to hold that kind of, what did you call it? Radically subjective, neutral space for your clients to process their experience and to come to a choice about how they want to go forward in a manner that's a true choice for them based on their worldview, their values, that might be very different from yours.

And I think I'm not perfect at this at all, to say the least. And I think every day I'm learning how to hold space for more ambiguity, for more questions, for more possibility of me being wrong about everything I know. And that equips me better to be able to listen and to be on the other person's side and to support them in a useful way.

Kara: Amen to all of that. I think the only thing I want to add is for me, one of the reasons about talking, and about this episode in particular, and in talking about where these different strands come from, is there's more for you to learn and explore.

Simone: Always, yeah.

Kara: It's like if you've read the main self-help books, or you've read everything that your coach or teacher's written, like, "Okay, but you're super interested in the part where you learn to observe your own mind, well, okay, there's centuries of many traditions writing about that you can dig into."

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

Simone: Yes. Treat all of your certification materials, all the training that you got so far as the starting point. That was your entry way in, and then you really get to do your own exploration, to come up with your own intellectual property. Have your own thoughts. And then make it yours.

I wish I could really impress this on everybody so that they stop wasting time trying to figure out, "Is this the absolute truth what my coaching teacher taught me?" And then trying to convince themselves that it is or rebel against it. It doesn't matter. This is where all the questions begin for you to come into your own authority about what you think and how you want to serve your clients.

Kara: Yeah. And we didn't get into the Ancient Greeks.

Simone: Ancient Greeks is going to be a whole other episode.

Kara: Control your mind, or it will control you. All right, that's all we got for you guys today. We'll have to do a follow-up. Bye, everyone.

Simone: Talk to you later.

—

If you've enjoyed listening to this podcast and all humor aside, you understand that in order to be the best coach you can be, you need a deeper understanding of the history, the politics, the sociology, the cultural framework, and the critical theory that has informed everything we've talked about on this podcast, then you're going to want to check out the Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching.

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

This is the only certification in the coaching industry that offers the depth of social justice and critical analysis with the most transformative life coaching tools available. I always say, if you try to coach a woman without understanding this stuff, you're bringing a butter knife to a sword fight.

If you want to get on the waitlist for the Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching, you can text your email address to +1-347-997-1784. And that's +1-347-997-1784. Just text us your email, you will get prompted for a codeword, and the codeword is just ACFC. Just those letters. All caps, all together like an acronym. ACFC.

Or you can visit unfuckyourbrain.com/acfc. Again, all one word, unfuckyourbrain.com/acfc to join the waitlist. If you are at all interested, I highly recommend doing this because last time we opened registration it sold out from the waitlist in a few days before we even emailed my whole list about it or posted about it publicly.

So there's a lot of pent-up demand building, which is amazing, and it just makes me so happy to know that so many people want to bring this feminist coaching perspective to their work. I want to make sure that if you are interested, you get on the list now, whenever you're listening to this so that you're notified for the next time we open because it does fill up really, really fast. Alright, I'll see some of you there.

—

Hey, this is Simone. If you're a life coach and you want to be as good at marketing as you are at coaching, you've got to get on my email list. I'm going to be honest, it's got a bit of a cult following and if you're into doing

3: How Realizing 'It's All Made up' Will Make You a Better Coach

things your way, as opposed to following somebody else's rules, and you don't mind me cursing a little bit, you're going to love my letters to you.

Sign up now at the link in the show notes and I'll send you a list of some wacky principles I followed to make my very first \$100,000 in my coaching business with an ADHD brain. I'll see you in your inbox.