

5: How to Elevate Your Coaching by Understanding Your Clients' Context



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Kara Loewentheil and Simone Seol

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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: Okay. So, today, we have a special culmination of the Outside the White Box: Elevating the Coaching Conversation podcast, and that is that if you've been listening to this podcast before, you have listened to Simone and I soberly but in the style of drunk professors riff on the various things that we've talked about, and we just wanted you to know that we're not the only crazy ones.

So we invited two of our favorite coaches and colleagues and friends to come on the podcast and talk about the ways in which they elevate the coaching conversation in their own niches and disciplines and the way in which they find that history or anthropology or sociology or other theory-based disciplines or frameworks impact their coaching. So we wanted to give you guys some kind of examples outside of Simone and I of how you can think about elevating your own work within your coaching niche from this perspective.

So I will let these powerhouses introduce themselves. They need no introduction, really, if you've been listening to my podcast. They've both been on it several times now. But I only have five friends, so we just got to

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keep repeating them through the podcast. So, Sonia, you want to introduce yourself and then Rachel?

Sonia: Sure, Kara. Hello, everybody. I'm Dr. Sonia Wright. I am the midlife sex coach for women, and I am all about working and helping women with whatever sexual difficulties, emotional pain, whatever they're dealing with around the issue of sex and helping them to create the sex life of their dreams. I basically believe that all women should have the opportunity to access their sexuality and express it whatever way they want to. As long as there's consent and no harm involved, I'm like, "Go for it and have some fun."

Kara: Also, you have to know that every time I look at Sonia, she has a giant red poppy behind her, which is just very sexually evocative to me at this point.

Sonia: It's all about...

Kara: Possibly because she's always talking about sex in front of it. I don't know if it's just me or it's a real Georgia O'Keeffe moment, but every time I look at it, I'm like, "Yes, let's open up, just open up."

Sonia: My head is right where the clitoris would be.

Kara: Yeah. Right above you, just like...

Rachel: Amazing.

Kara: Tell us who you are, Rachel.

Rachel: Who am I? That is a good question.

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Kara: I don't know.

Rachel: If you guys are the drunk professors, then I am the drunk coach maybe.

Kara: Yeah, that's true. That really works out.

Rachel: My name is Rachel Hart. I have been on this podcast before.

Kara: I talk about Rachel in almost every episode. Let's be real. We're platonic life partners.

Rachel: Platonic life partners forever. So I work with people who want to change their relationship with alcohol, and that can mean maybe they want to drink less frequently or less in a sitting, maybe they want to take a break, maybe they're ready to be like, "You know what? I might want to say goodbye to drinking." But whatever that is, I really help people see that they can trust themselves to decide what is right for them and what's going to work best for them. I think that talking about history is really important, so I'm excited to be here because I feel like I know...

Kara: I didn't even put that together that Rachel is a history - would buff be the right word? Well, it's very specific. Rachel knows more about the history of Connecticut than anyone currently alive other than the endowed chair of Connecticut Studies at Connecticut State University if that exists.

Rachel: And I will take them on, whoever you are.

Kara: Yeah, Rachel will take them on. When Rachel was a little kid, she used to hang out at the historical society in her town and read all of the dusty old papers and the narwhal tusks. I hadn't even thought about that historical connection, but...

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Rachel: Do people not hang out at historical societies? Is that not a thing?

Kara: I don't think that's really a thing.

Rachel: Not to take this too far, but sometimes I will go to historical societies in California, and I'm just like, "No."

Kara: The no is mostly that it's not 400 years old. She's like, "This is too new." Rachel's like, "You shouldn't have a historical society in this state. It's too new."

Rachel: I was just like, "It's not Connecticut." You're not...

Kara: Before I met Rachel, I didn't know that people had a strong Connecticut identity. I didn't really realize that this was a place where people...

Rachel: People think it's only Texas. It's only Texas gets to love their state. But I'm here to tell you that Nutmeggers, we're here to love our state as well.

Kara: Okay. Anyway, let's...

Rachel: Anyway. Sorry.

Kara: Anyway, moving on, Sonia, would you like to start us off with some thoughts about how you bring a historical or a different intellectual perspective or how you... I know you know what the podcast is about and you went through the Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching, so just tell us a little bit about how you bring a more elevated and conceptual intellectual background into your coaching and your work.

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Sonia: Yeah. So I'm going to tie it into ACFC. I really wanted to be in that program because I really wanted to focus in on Black women and their sexuality and bring the historical construct that had not really been spoken and talked about that much and how it was impacting Black women's sex, that we weren't necessarily feeling in control of our sexuality or owning up to our sexuality.

So, for me, it was important to look at the history, going way back to colonizing Africa and what people were saying and thinking about the African women at that time up into the present time, as to why it is that... I'm not saying that all Black women are not necessarily tapped into their sexuality, but there's a number of stereotypes that are there because of history, and if we don't understand the history behind things, then we're not necessarily able to tap into what's going on now with stereotypes and concepts around our sexuality as Black women. So that's how I bring it all together.

I kind of go back to when people were looking at African people and saying, "Oh, African women are promiscuous or too voluptuous or too curvy," or that they're savage, whatever there is, their concepts and beliefs. It comes back to monetary reasons, really, like they want to save the savage soul. But, really, it comes back to, "I want to deconstruct Africa and take away the resources," and then, at some point in time, it becomes, "Let's enslave people because they can't take care of themselves. They're lesser, and they don't necessarily have a soul, so let's enslave them."

Then we can go from there. There's a lot that goes on. But it's really knowing and understanding the history behind things and the history of slavery in the United States and how that's impacting women and sexuality.

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So that's a lot. Then just, overall, sexuality for women in general, not specifically just for Black women, but how it affects all women.

Kara: Yeah. I would love to hear even more about that because your ACFC project was so... For the final certification, people had to either redo a tool or just do a new tool, a new lesson using the material, and I thought your project was so amazing. It was about how the stereotypes and history of slavery and oppression impact Black women's sexuality now.

So I would just love if you could talk more about that because I think it's such a good example of how if you're a coach who doesn't know anything about this, then if you are coaching, let's say, a Black woman about her sexuality and her thoughts about sexuality, you don't have the whole picture and you're not going to necessarily understand - in coaching, we're often sort of like, "Oh, a thought just comes out of your brain," but, well, I don't know, maybe if the thought has been told to a certain group of people for 300 years, it's not so much just that you made it up, that kind of context. So do you mind elaborating on what you wrote in your project and more about that?

Sonia: Yeah. I think that this is very important because if you have a client come to you that's a Black woman and she's not comfortable with her sexuality in some way and you're just focusing on, "Oh, that's what your thoughts are, and let's switch around your thoughts," but you're not recognizing the context of these thoughts, the stereotypes that have been imposed upon her for her entire lifetime. She doesn't even know why she feels guilty and shame around her body, but she doesn't realize that other people and the society in general has been policing her body and saying it's too curvy, she has thick thighs, or whatever it is, right?

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But if we're talking about sexuality, then we need to go back to slavery times, where we're talking about - there was definitely a concept of what a Black woman slave was and how she was too promiscuous and how she was vivacious and asking for sex, and so, therefore, there's no laws against her being raped. She's property. She's basically asking for these things.

But we're not looking at the monetary gain. What is the monetary gain of having a Black woman labeled as promiscuous, right? Then the owners can sexually abuse them, exploit them. It's like the whole blaming the victim type of concept that we're looking at here. You can exploit somebody for monetary reasons, and you don't have to recognize that they're in this position where they don't have a choice. Their choice is either to be raped or give these sexual favors that are required or they might be sold on the block or maybe their family member might be sold on a block.

Then there's the whole issue of colorism that comes in, right? If you're darker-skinned, are you as valuable as lighter-skinned? Then you might end up in more financial situations for exchange of money for sex. So there's just so much that goes into it. But if you look at it, the baseline is Black women are promiscuous. This is a big stereotype that's been out there, and if we don't know the history of it, then we don't have a good understanding that this stereotype is being forced on a group of people. From the time they're young, they're feeling this shame that has nothing to do with them, and they don't feel comfortable with their sexuality.

So there's this concept of this stereotype where it's the promiscuous woman, but then there's another type of stereotype that came up as well, which is the mammy and the asexual woman, right? Now, if we look at the asexual woman, the mammy was the best type of slave. She was there, and she took care of the children. She wasn't threatening sexually in any

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way. Then the concept of fatphobia comes in because now, usually, asexuality is tied to a larger individual. It's an either/or, right? So you get this dynamic set up with either you're a promiscuous individual or your only other choice is to be asexual.

If we go even further with the history of things after the abolition of slavery, then we get into this period of time where we as a people could also have taken on this concept that we were promiscuous and we want to get away from these concepts, so then we take on another set of concepts, which is having to do with respectability, and we get to this place where we have to be - the Black woman is not necessarily allowed to own her sexuality because, for the good of the whole race, we have to be respectable, we have to shun and stay away from our sexuality.

That's up to the present, and in some ways, religion is also - if we're hiding in the church as well to keep that respectability and to have that respectability, then we're at this place as well where we don't really have a choice. Are we just promiscuous? Are we asexual? Are we repressed and respectable? What kind of choices are those, right?

All of those are things that are placed upon a Black woman. It's almost like, "Okay, here are your three choices." What I do in my coaching is to recognize that this history has occurred over an extended period of time, explain that this history is there but also say to the Black woman, "You do have a choice. You do have the ability to choose how you want to express your sexuality, who you want to be, and I'm here on the journey with you to help you if you choose that you want to do that."

But so many Black women give me this blank stare like they don't know how to tap into their sexuality. They don't know exactly what that is unless

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it's some prescribed thing that somebody else has told them that, "Oh, if you want to be sexual, then this means you have to be a rump-shaker and you have to be really promiscuous." You actually get to be whatever the hell you want to be. If you want to shake your rump, shake it. If you don't want to shake it, you don't have to. But you get to define your sexuality for yourself. So that's how I incorporate it all into my coaching.

Kara: Yeah. This is all so good. When I read your project, I was more familiar with the legacy of slavery but was not as familiar with the stereotype of the church woman, of the experience of Black women in the church and that part of their respectability politics, which is such an important aspect of it.

So if you're a coach who doesn't know this, I think a lot of - being a coach is funny, right? Some of the time, what we're doing is just asking people questions, listening to their thoughts. But some of what we do is put into words things that people think and feel that they haven't been able to articulate, that they don't necessarily have access to or they don't really understand how to say.

When you understand that history, you're in a very different position towards a client, being able to say, "Well, it might be this. Does this sound familiar? Do you feel like this? Am I getting the blank stare because these are the only three options you've heard? Here's where that comes from. It's not just you." The more that we talk about this stuff, the more that I'm just like, you can't coach without all of this stuff. How are you even equipped to handle what's going on if you don't have that background and that understanding? It's just such a totally different experience.

Sonia: Exactly. If you don't recognize that this woman feels the weight and the responsibility for her whole race, if she taps into her sexuality, that is

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going to reflect on a whole race, that's a lot. That's a lot of responsibility for somebody to have on their shoulder when you can express to them, "Okay, I hear that this is what maybe you have been taught. You get to look at this situation, and you get to decide what's best for you, and we're all individuals. We're not just one big monolith of people. We are all individuals. We have different cultures. We have different backgrounds. We have different beliefs. You actually can tap into your sexuality, and it will be okay."

Kara: Yeah. I have so many other questions about that, but, Rachel, do you want to tell us a little bit about how you think about this stuff? Then I have some follow-up questions for both of you.

Rachel: Yeah. I think one of the things that has been so powerful for me in my own work that I do with myself is understanding where some of my beliefs come from. I think it has really shifted. There have been moments like, "Oh, that's why I believe that?" I didn't just come up with it. It's not just true. But, actually, we can trace this thought and this way of thinking and this stereotype or belief backs through hundreds or thousands of years?

To me, that always gives me so much freedom because then I'm like, "Oh, I see where you came from. You didn't just appear." For me and the work that I do, I think one of the things - I have a class that I teach about AA because it is such a prominent approach when it comes to people who want to stop drinking. One of the things that I did for that class was actually go and read the big book. It was so illuminating for me to see.

One of the things that we talk a lot culturally is the idea of drinking too much is a disease, and that idea of it being a disease is something I think is very common, even though a lot of people, especially a lot of people in harm reduction, are starting to question, is it really a disease. Going back

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and reading through the big book, it was very clear to me, yeah, they think it's a disease, but they think it's a spiritual disease.

All of a sudden, it was like little things just clicked in place to understand why there's so much connection about if you want to change this, you need to ask for a higher power and you need to remove defects of character and you need to atone for your sins. Yeah, this is talked about in the big book as a spiritual disease, a spiritual deficiency.

I just think understanding that can be really helpful, especially for people - I work with a lot of people who feel like they're in no man's land. The image that has been presented to them is either you are a normal drinker, which everyone should be and you shouldn't ever struggle with alcohol, or if you struggle at all to say no, it means that you're an alcoholic and you need to admit that you're powerless and say no for the rest of your life.

And that, for a lot of people, are like, "I don't feel like I fit in either spot, and, P.S., it's also not appealing for me to put on a label and to decide that I'm never going to drink for the rest of my life." So it can feel, I think, very - it's not even demoralizing. It's just hopeless. It's like, "Where am I supposed to go? What am I supposed to do?"

I think just understanding, "Hey, this is why we talk about it in this way," and understanding how much these messages, they're not just found in a 12-step meeting. They're in Seinfeld, right? You can turn on TV and go to the movies and so many of these messages from someone's idea in the 1930s, it's so prevalent in our culture. So I think that can give just a freedom for people to be like, "Okay, well, maybe that's actually not something that I want to ascribe to. Maybe that's not something that is the right fit for me." We can go way further back than the 1930s.

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Kara: Yes, tell us your Mesopotamia story. I have a follow-up question.

Rachel: One of the things that people really struggle with, especially when they're contemplating, "Maybe I don't even want to drink, but it would be weird if I didn't drink," a lot of people have this idea that not drinking is abnormal or weird and there's something - it's a sign that something's wrong with you.

So I was doing some reading about this and reading about Mesopotamia and the fact that they were one of the first groups of people that were able to really harness fermentation and start making beer on a wide scale. There's this epic poem, the Epic of Gilgamesh, that's all about this Sumerian king, and there's a character in the poem who is the wild man and has to be brought into civilization.

One of the ways that they do this is they introduce him into the customs of eating bread and drinking beer, and then that becomes your initiation into being humans. Mesopotamians really thought that what distinguished them from who they thought were savages, like hunter-gatherers who weren't settled and didn't live in cities, was in part the fact that they had bread and they had beer.

The other piece I think is really interesting about that is that you can find these depictions of early Mesopotamians drinking beer from a shared vessel and they're drinking from straws. There's also this belief that I'll hear a lot from people, and I remember thinking this. It's like, "Well, you can't trust someone who doesn't drink. Someone who doesn't drink is not someone that you can trust."

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You go back and you look and you see that one of the reasons why we have this kind of belief around this is because sharing beer was a practice that people actually believed, "Oh, okay, I can trust this person. I can trust that this beverage isn't going to be poisoned. It isn't going to be unsafe for me to drink because you're drinking from it, too."

Surely, though, because they're just drinking from a shared container and drinking - it's interesting, hey were drinking from straws as well because in their initial ways in which they would make beer, they would drink from a reed straw because there was all this chaff and debris in the beer. But it's just like, "Oh." Right? This thought that it's human to drink and it's a sign of your humanness or the idea that...

Kara: And your trustworthiness.

Rachel: And your trustworthiness. We're literally going back to Mesopotamia. I think just understanding where these beliefs come from, for me, is really liberating because then I get to be like, "Oh, right? Am I taking advice from a Sumerian king? Is that what we're doing here or not?"

Kara: Always. That's my life philosophy, just what did the Sumerian kings do? I'm in. Yeah, I think that's so important because I feel like one of the reasons people come to coaching sometimes is that they're like, "Well, I went to a lot of" - and, obviously, much of therapy is amazing, some of coaching is terrible. It's all a big Venn diagram, right? But there's this stereotype that, well, therapy or at least contemporary talk therapy is about what happened in the past. You don't need to know what happened in the past, right? We can just take the thought now. We can just change it.

I mean, yes, that's true, but I think that we don't need to know about the Sumerians because we're going to go back and argue with the Sumerians

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about history, but understanding where a thought comes from, I find, is also super helpful because it enables the disidentification that has to happen in order for you to change something.

And especially when you have some sort of deep cultural belief, like, I don't know, I've just always felt ashamed of my body and been told that it doesn't look right since I was three years old and so I don't know - it just feels so deep and so old.

I just coached someone in The Clutch on antisemitism, and one of the things we talked about was, well, if you grow up Jewish, you're just being told this from zero, age zero, that in the end they always come for us and kill us. That's the message you get your whole life, and there's all this historical evidence to back it up, and everybody's got epigenetic trauma from generations and generations of people running around the globe being chased out of different places.

So, of course, you just grow up completely hypervigilant, right? Your nervous system is just constantly on edge. Understanding, "Okay, that's why I feel this way, this is where it came from," knowing where it comes from doesn't magically solve it, but it enables you to separate it from enough to be like, "Oh, this isn't just my brain. I'm not thinking it because it's true. I don't feel hypervigilant because the world is dangerous and scary all the time."

I think so much of this is helping people, really, just disidentify from their thoughts in a way that's different from Vipassana meditation where you just watch them go by. These are all ways I think that the more you can help explain to someone why you think this way, what that culture is, the easier it is for them to be like, "Oh, that's not mine. I don't have to believe that."

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Rachel: Yeah. I remember one of the first things that I started doing when I was first introduced to the model and making the connection that a lot of the thoughts that I had about my body and my appearance were straight from the patriarchy and how I was supposed to be pleasing for other people.

That was really powerful for me to stand in front of the mirror and watch the thoughts come up and then just be like, "Thanks, patriarchy." It was just like that ability for me to be like, "It's not mine, it's not mine, it's not mine. It's not true. It's this belief system that I didn't choose to adopt but I'm just swimming in it." That ability to just identify what it is, it's not me, it's not true, I think, exactly what you're saying, it's so powerful.

Kara: So I'm curious if either of you or both of you want to speak on - have you experienced the opposite, where you have gone to - many amazing coaches just don't always have the knowledge for a particular situation, but I feel like a lot of people I know, at least who come to my kind of coaching, have had experiences with the coaching industry or with coaches in general where it felt like this part was lacking, this part was missing.

So I'm curious if you guys have had experiences. I feel like before I even found The Life Coach School and before I found thought work, I went to this coach, I would say, who was missing a lot of this context. I just remember just being like, "This person, they don't understand me at all." It was just like you're missing such huge pieces of context about what's going on here that they're not even able to speak to me.

I've told this story before. I've maybe even told it on this podcast. But before I even signed up for coach certification, I wrote this letter to Brooke Castillo back when she still read letters on her podcast because she used

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to always say on her podcast and still teaches, "It's all perfect. It all happened for a reason." As a Jew, I was like, "That is a very Christian thought. That's not what we think. That's not what I've been taught. This doesn't resonate with me." So the question was just sort of being like, "Well, how can I reconcile blah, blah, blah?" Obviously, I reconciled it for myself. I think that comes up in the coaching world a lot.

So maybe this question isn't necessarily have you been to a coach but what are things you see in the coaching world that are like that? One of the things I see from my Jewish perspective is the everything's perfect, there's a plan, the universe is happening for you. I'm like, "Said by a people who have never been the subject of a genocide."

I just don't think there's a lot of Jews who are like, "Oh, the world is happening for me. Yes, that pogrom was amazing. Thank you for the Holocaust." That just does not resonate with my historical trauma. Then, of course, the weight loss stuff, which we haven't talked about, the whole coaching world is rife with shit like, "Extra weight on your body is just unprocessed emotions," or whatever kind of shit people say.

Rachel: Well, I think there is a lot of people who want to say that alcohol is poison and that it's toxic for your body and you're harming yourself. I think it's of the same kind of flavor of, I think, a lot of people in the wellness or health sphere that talk about food and your body as if it's like we're dealing with purity and the temple.

Listen, I think it can be totally powerful, if you've had a challenging relationship with your body, to start - it could be a powerful thought to think that it's a temple. You can so use it against yourself, this idea of, "Oh, I should only put things in my body that are pure and clean," right?

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I watched so many of the people that I work with, they start to convince themselves, "Oh, it is bad for me, and it is a poison, and we're not meant to consume alcohol," which I'm like, "Well, I don't know, it has been around for thousands of years and there are a lot of health reasons that it - you had a safer water supply, right, when you were boiling water to make beer." I think there are reasons for that that we can say, "It's here." We don't have to label it as bad. We don't have to label it as a poison or evil or a toxin because then we just swing to the other side of, "Well, why did I drink that much last night?" I think that can be really challenging.

Kara: Yeah. What about you, Sonia?

Sonia: I think that it's interesting coming from the perspective of a person of color. I have a number of different labels that you could put on me, right? I don't usually go looking for a coach that is actually going to understand my perspective. I would be shocked. That's why I said when I was working with you at the ACFC that I was shocked. I don't expect it. I kind of compartmentalize who I am.

Kara: Sonia's reflection was like, "Definitely thought this was going to be a lot of white feminism. Pleasantly surprised that you knew about intersectionality."

Sonia: So I'm not shocked, but I'm not expecting it either, really. I'm not expecting them to understand my life as a Black woman in her 50s that's pansexual and poly and an immigrant to this country. There's so many levels that they'd have to - and four foot 11. There's so many things that they'd have to get, right?

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So that's not what I'm not expecting. But when I find it, I'm shocked and amazed, and, actually, it can bring me to tears because it's like I'm seen in a different way that I'm not necessarily seen. I think that this is something when you're dealing with people of marginalized areas in their life, where they're so used to not being seen that they don't expect to be seen. So when they're not seen, it's like, "Well, yeah." But if you are in fact seen, then you almost don't know what to do with it.

A lot has changed in the last year in terms of the George Floyd murder and other things with that where you are being seen in a way that they haven't been seen before. Racism was something that was a thought in our mind previously for a lot of coaches, like, "Oh, that doesn't really exist." So you would expect that they wouldn't necessarily understand what your experience has been with it. But now there are people that are actually trying to know and to understand and to get an idea of what your experience may be and to bring that into the coaching session with something that's truly amazing.

Kara: Yeah. I remember when somebody's like, "Wait, you can put it in the C-line," and I was like, "I've been doing that for years. It's okay. You can put sexism and racism in the C-line. Nothing's blown up. My models are fine. You can do it. I promise."

Sonia: Yeah.

Kara: Yeah, I think that's such an interesting point. There's the privilege of even expecting that your perspective is going to be understood. I definitely feel like that from the weight stuff side. Yeah, I just expect that I'm going to hear some stupid nonsense and that I'm going to have to screen it out, although things are picking up a little bit more there.

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Yeah, and I think that reflection on - this is funny. When Simone's on, usually, I'm the one being like, "You have to understand this to be a good coach," and Simone's like, "People are good coaches and love their client." She's much nicer, and I'm like, "You got to get your shit together. Go read a book."

The other side of it is what you can offer, right, and that you don't have to be - even though I'm more yell-y, part of the point of this podcast to me is to - it's not to make people feel like, "Well, if you don't have a PhD in several disciplines, you're not going to be a good coach." That's obviously not true. I have a PhD in zero disciplines. Neither does Rachel. Sonia might have a PhD. I'm not sure. You have an MD, at least.

Sonia: An MD, yeah.

Kara: Yeah, I have a JD, unrelated to what I coach on. But you don't have to be an expert. I'm not an expert, right? Every little bit you can do to educate yourself about the world and to show up to - even if it's just to show up with the humility of understanding that somebody might have a different life experience, there's power just in being like, "Here's what I'm hearing, but I haven't had your lived experience. Am I missing something? Is there something else you'd want me to know?" You don't have to already be the expert. You just have to be willing to believe that learning more might help inform your coaching.

Rachel: I think it's also like, as a coach, being willing to just accept that you have so many blind spots and you're always going to have so many blind spots. I remember having, which I'm sure, Kara, you thought was just a hysterically stupid conversation. So I was raised Episcopalian. There was a congregational church on every town green in Connecticut. But everyone in my family is like, "Huh? Religion? What?" I don't know. We don't go to

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church. I remember my family taking me to church, I don't know, under five times.

I didn't have any experience reading the Bible until I got to college and took a class on the New Testament. I remember asking my roommate at the time, "How do you find the page? I don't understand." She was like, "Oh my God, what is going on?" I had this conversation with Kara where one of the things that was coming up for me a lot were a lot of very Christian beliefs, but I was like, "What? But I don't even believe this. I wasn't even raised this way." I remember Kara saying something to me like, "Yeah, but it's just we're just in it, Rachel. You're so..."

Kara: Rachel was 100% a Puritan from 1790. She was like a Calvinist. She was like, "I don't know what you're talking about. It's just that pleasure is sinful and bad, and we have to work to earn our worth and also only 70 people can succeed in life. But I don't know why you think that this is Christian."

Sonia: You get it from the historical society.

Rachel: But it was...

Kara: Right. "I'm in the historical society. Just coming to you from the historical society to tell you that you have to earn rest with hard work and you must be skeptical of pleasure and money corrupts, but everything else"

Rachel: Listen, it was like it's because we're in a culturally Christian environment, right, in the US and because I had this very strong thought like, "I'm not religious. I didn't grow up religious." It was like the wires were crossing, that I was like, "But this doesn't make sense." I remember the conversation with you, Kara, and I was like, "Oh, so even though I didn't go to church, it's all there?" It seems so silly to say now, but it was such a blind

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spot for me. It really clashed with this idea that I had of myself of, "My family's not religious. It's not what we do. We don't go to church."

I think just understanding, "Oh, right, I'm just always going to have blind spots and I'm always going to have blind spots for my clients and I'm never not going to have a blind spot." The idea is can it be this thing of curiosity and like, "Oh my gosh, I just want to know more, and I never understood it this way, or I didn't know this history," rather than, "Oh, see, I'm doing it wrong. Oh, see, I don't know enough." We don't need to have PhDs. We just need to have a willingness to say, "Yeah, I am blind to so many things, and there's so many things that I don't understand, and I just have a deep passion to know more and to want to know more."

Kara: Yeah. I mean, I think I learned a ton of shit in ACFC, and I was running it, just from talking to everybody. We had a whole post. I try to model what I'm teaching, and we had a whole post where I was like, "Put shit in here that I missed or fucked up so I can fix it next time and make it better."

Obviously, coaches want to be able to help their clients, but it's like people have to get over so much imposter syndrome and insecurity to become a coach in the first place. Then I feel like we're like, "Okay, guess what? Surprise. You also don't know anything about the world, and now we got to learn all this stuff." So people, they have that fear or shame, "I'm doing it wrong, it's too hard, I'm going to fuck it up," whatever. It's all that same shit, whereas when you work through that, you're willing to be like, "Yeah, I totally missed that. Let me try to do better next time."

The next group of people who go through this are going to be like, "Hey, you missed this shit now." I'm going to be like, "All right, we got to do that again." It's just always an iterative process, right? But I think, yeah, that

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curiosity - I feel like people think the bar is so high, and, actually, the bar is very low. I am excited if anybody mentions that health at any size might exist or that Christianity isn't the only religion. I don't expect my coaches to be experts in fat radical politics or Judaism. I'm just excited if they know that maybe there are other things out there. The bar is actually quite low. So if that encourages people to give it a try, that's the goal for me.

Sonia: That concept of a blind spot, it's something hard for me to initially grasp because, as a doctor, we're taught to hide all of our blind spots, like we no longer have blind spots. So when you're shifting...

Kara: You're like, "Surprise, I went to medical school, and now all my blind spots are gone. It's amazing."

Sonia: They're all gone. Miraculously, they just disappear, right? Then you go into the world of sex coaching, and you realize, one, you're not taught anything about sex in medical school, so you're starting from zero even though you think you should know something about it. Then this curiosity, definitely one of my favorite things, to just be able to be like, "I don't necessarily know it all." There's so much of the imposter syndrome and so much of trying to cover it all up and appear like you know everything. That is what really causes so much stress in our lives and discomfort or whatever.

Then when we're able to be like, "Okay, it's all right if I don't know, it's okay if I ask, just don't make assumptions and find out what's going on," and then when we're talking about understanding a person's individual history and, you're right, when we talk about coaching, we're focusing on the present. But if I'm dealing with sex and sexuality, I have to get an idea of what they were taught when they were younger or what thoughts are in

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their minds. I have to be able to go back to the history of just that individual person's history. So there's so much that we have to learn.

Kara: Yeah.

Rachel: Yeah.

Kara: I mean, that's a whole other conversation we should have, we could have and we should have another time because we don't have time today. But the blind spots that come up in sex and relationship coaching are so huge. If you are a monogamous, not kink-positive coach, and somebody comes to you and is like, "I can't stop thinking about sleeping with other people and also I like sexual pain," you're going to be like, "Oh my God, this is a big problem, we have to fix all of these things," as opposed to understanding, "Oh, there's actually lots of different kinds of relationship structures and there's lots of different kinds of sexuality." That is a good example of how the bar is so low in that sense. We have so many more, I think, poly and kink-positive people in the Clutch, even though I don't even talk about that stuff that much but I just occasionally mention that it exists and...

Sonia: The fact that you even acknowledge that it exists, right?

Kara: Right. It's like that's enough. Right. Yeah.

Sonia: Yes. There's not too many places where they can go and just feel like, "Okay, this is something, I get to be normal here. This is something that's acceptable to certain..."

Kara: Right. This coach at least knows that this exists, so I'm going to risk that.

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Sonia: Yes, exactly.

Kara: I think maybe the last thing I would say about it is when you're thinking about this as a coach, which I think is probably the bulk of the 12 listeners who are going to listen to this podcast series that we've done now, it's like your job is not to know everything, but even the smallest gesture may be what makes someone feel safe.

You have to imagine a client who is very different from you, has a very different life experience, maybe has had negative experiences in the coaching industry before with people telling them that, yeah, racism goes in the T-line or whatever else. People are so brave to keep trying, and they just need a little signal from you that you understand and that you are open to understanding and that you have some knowledge and understanding of where they're coming from.

You don't have to be the expert, but when you can create just a little bit of safety, you make the space for people to show up as their full selves. This is something you said, Sonia, in your reflection, is there aren't a lot of places that I get to show up as my full self, and that's what we want coaching to do for everybody, right? That's the whole point of coaching. It's supposed to be to teach people to be able to show up in the world as their whole selves.

Rachel: Yeah, and trust themselves, right? It's like knowing that you don't know what is best for your client. It's not your job. Your job is just to be there and say, "Let's take a look at your mind together. We're going to do it together, and we're going to do it without judgment and not in the way that you've normally done it, which is like, 'It's wrong, it's stupid, why am I doing this over and over again?'" It's just like, "Let's just hold hands together and check it out and see what's in there. I have no idea what's right for you."

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I was coaching someone today who was like, "Why is my numbing a problem," and I was like, "Who says it is? Why are we even starting from that assumption that it's bad in the evening if you feel bored to eat or drink or get high or do any of that?" It's just like that willingness to just say, "I don't know what is best for you or what is right for you. I just want to look with you."

Kara: Yeah. And the more places you know how to look, the better. That's how we can tie it up. Thank you, guys, both so much for coming on. Everybody should go follow Dr. Sonia Wright and Ms. Rachel Hart. They are both fantastic. Obviously, I have them on my podcast all the time. Just doing brilliant work. Go learn from them. Where are you guys, on Instagram, you have podcasts, what's happening? Rachel has a podcast. It's called Take a Break.

Rachel: Yes, and I'm on Instagram, too. It's called Take a Break from Drinking.

Kara: Sonia, you have a podcast, too, right? What's your podcast?

Sonia: Yeah, The Midlife Sex Coach for Women podcast.

Kara: Yes, so good. All right. Thank you, guys. Thank you, women.

Rachel: Thank you.

Sonia: Thank you.

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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.

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.

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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 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.

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