

**UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and
Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced
Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates
Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

[UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil](#)

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

Welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And now here's your host, Harvard Law School grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello my chickens. If there is one topic that I'm not sure we can ever discuss enough, other than why it's important to manage your mind, it is people pleasing because it is such a fucking epidemic among so many of us because of the way that we are raised and socialized, and because of the human desire to be in a tribe and not be rejected and not be left alone to die in the jungle or eaten by wolves in the forest.

So people pleasing comes up all the time. It comes up in my own self-coaching, it comes up when I'm coaching my students in *The Clutch*. It's just a huge, huge issue that so many people struggle with. So I was super excited to talk about it with three of my amazing coaches.

These all are certified coaches who have also graduated from my Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching. And we've got a sex coach, we've got a marriage coach, and we've got a people-pleasing coach. And obviously, sex and marriage are places that people pleasing comes up quite a bit. And then one of the coaches actually specializes in coaching around people pleasing and reclaiming your own authority.

So, such a good conversation. We are getting very, very close to the launch and registration opening for the next Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching. This is the only way to get certified to teach my work. It is the best feminist coaching certification in the world. I feel very confident in saying that.

[UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil](#)

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates

Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

It has the most powerful tools, the best grounding in the history and the theory, and I only do this once a year. It's very time-intensive, it takes a lot of incredible investment of time and energy from me, from the students, from my team, so we only do it once a year and we are going to be opening registration soon for the class that will graduate in 2022.

So that means if you've been thinking about this, this registration that's coming up in November is your only chance to get in before 2023. So if you want to do this before 2023, assuming we all make it that long, given the way the world is going - I'm kidding. I believe we're going to make it that long.

But the point is you're not going to be able to apply again, you're not going to be able to do this again until 2023. So now is the time. So if you want to get on the list to make sure that you find out when we open, last time this program, this certification filled up in 48 hours.

And it is an application process, it's rolling, so if you want to be one of the first people to apply, if you think you want to do it, and we do offer scholarships as well as always with my programs, so you can get on the email list that will get the first notice, the heads up to get going by going to unfuckyourbrain.com/acfc.

Or you can text your email to +1-347-997-1784. That's +1-347-997-1784. You send us your email, we'll ask you for the codeword in a text, and then you just text back ACFC. So unfuckyourbrain.com/acfc or follow those texting instructions if you want to get on the list. Now, let's really get into people pleasing and how we're going to turn that people-pleasing ship around.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

—

Kara: My chickens, I feel sometimes like Roman's countrymen, lend me your ears. Chickens, my chickens. Today we are talking about something that only every single one of you struggles with in multiple ways. And I have multiple podcast episodes about it and we can never have too many. We can never have too many.

In fact, I just found out that the week we're recording this is my 200th podcast episode, which is kind of mind-blowing. And also, I'm bad with anniversaries so we did nothing special for it and I didn't even know until the staff meeting today. And then I was like, why didn't I know this? I could have recorded a thing. And my team was like, "Well, you had a task that said record intro to 200th episode, so it was right there."

Anyway, I feel like every 20 episodes we should have one about people pleasing because this is such an issue for everybody socialized as a woman, everybody who identifies as a woman, lots of people who don't identify as either.

So I have three of my amazing graduates of the Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching, two of whom are also going to be teaching at the upcoming Clutch College, which is very exciting. And I'm going to let them introduce themselves, and then we are just going to get into it.

We're going to talk about people pleasing, how it shows up in their niches, with their practices, with their clients, what's going on in women's brains, why we do this so much, just all the things. Alright, I'll ask you to introduce

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

yourselves by turn so it doesn't get chaotic. Going counterclockwise on the Zoom, Sara, you want to start us off?

Sara: Yes. I'm Sara Bybee Fisk. I am a coach and a teacher and I coach specifically on people pleasing. And so I'm here for this.

Kara: She is the expert. I got to tell you guys, you didn't know Sara before but Sara came to the living room retreat that I did. This is after ACFC. She went through the whole advanced certification with me, and then she came to a small group retreat I did and I coached her very gently and not at all aggressively for an hour or 90 minutes.

Sara: I tried to wiggle out of the coaching for at least the first 15 minutes.

Kara: I definitely didn't make her cry multiple times about taking...

Sara: Happy tears.

Kara: About taking authority, not avoiding her anxiety and taking authority in her own life. And it is like, I haven't seen her since then, we got on this call, and I was like, what is happening with you? She just showed up like, yes, hi. She used to show up kind of like, "Hi, I'm Sara, and if nobody minds, I have something I would like to offer maybe in the corner."

Sara: If it pleases the court.

Kara: If it may please the court and everyone else here, I might have something to offer very tentatively and quietly. And then we showed up to this call and she just showed up like a badass. I can't even explain, her

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

whole energy was different. She was just like, “Hey, what’s up? Yeah, I’m here, let’s go.” It’s just amazing. So good. Alright, Sonia, tell us all about you.

Sonia: Hello everybody, I’m Dr. Sonia. I am a medical doctor, sexual counselor, and a life coach. I put it all together. I’m the midlife sex coach for women. And I’m basically focused on helping women have a great sex life, if we put it that way.

Kara: And there’s no people pleasing in sex at all obviously. That never comes up.

Sonia: That never comes up. Never comes up at all. Women come to me and they’re like, “I am demanding my sexual pleasure. This is how it’s going down, Dr. Sonia, we’re going to do this.” So people pleasing comes up all the time, especially in terms of the male gaze and how women are socialized in this society and focused on somebody else’s pleasure as opposed to their own. And so I spend all the time saying, “What about your pleasure? What about you?”

Kara: Yeah, we’re going to dig into that for sure. Alright, Maggie, another niche in which people pleasing never comes up is marriage. This is never an issue.

Maggie: I have to compose myself, I’ve been laughing the whole episode so far. So hello, my name is Maggie Reyes. I am a marriage coach and mentor and I work with Type A women who want better marriages, and people pleasing only comes up like every day.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

Kara: Just 90% of the time. That's all. So good. Well, so let's start off with hearing - we can go in reverse order that we just did. Hearing a little bit about how people pleasing comes up in your work, where do you see your clients struggling with it the most. Because I actually think one of the most fascinating things - some people really know they're people-pleasers and they identify.

It's almost a badge of pride. They're like, oh yes, I'm a people-pleaser. We think that's a good thing about us. We're like, oh, I'm just so empathetic so I'm a people-pleaser. But I think a lot of people don't even correctly identify the ways in which some of their behavior is people pleasing. So I would love to hear from each of you and starting with you Maggie, where it shows up and especially what are some of the things your clients do that they don't even know are people pleasing, where it's kind of sneaky.

Maggie: Yeah, so a lot of the clients I work with are professional business owners who have a lot on their plate. And what happens in a lot in my case is we see burnout and we see overwhelm. And when we dig deeper to find the root cause of these things, we find that there's a lot of yeses that really should have been nos.

We find a lot of extending ourselves in ways that doesn't feel nourishing, that doesn't feel aligned with our values. And so sometimes the person has some self-awareness, they've done some personal development work and they are aware, oh, I do that when I'm people pleasing.

And sometimes, literally we're just investigating what's going on, how did we create this amount of mental load, all the things that we carry in our brain every day, and then we find out, oh, here's what it is, I'm scared to

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

say no, or here's what it is, I thought I had to say yes, I thought no wasn't even an option on the table.

And of course, as you have taught us so well in the advanced certification course, our partners have internalized patriarchy too. So they're not going to alert us, hey, maybe we should do this differently. And a lot of times they will have resistance when we propose to do things differently, which we would then coach on that, and allowing the discomfort of making changes.

So I see it a lot in day-to-day, whether it's parenting, whether it's making life decisions together, whether it's chores, the simplest of things. It just comes up in the most minor things and in the big picture of life and the big decisions too.

Kara: Do you feel like it's more that they're people pleasing outside of their life, outside the relationship in ways that leave them feeling like overwhelmed and drained in the relationship? Or are they people pleasing inside the relationship and trying to please their partner too?

Maggie: Honestly, it's both. Very often when we have this reaction, it happens across the board very often. Sometimes it happens more in one place than others. I see a lot of over-functioning for your boss.

By over-functioning I mean not letting the person involved experience the consequence of their actions. So I was telling a client the other day, anything that feels like you're swooping in, I made swoop a feeling, and whenever you feel swoop, stop, just stop, and pause, and question. And here's something Kara that I actually wanted to ask you today. I'd like your thoughts on this. I have a new hypothesis and let me know what you think.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

When we swoop in, when we do not allow our partners or our bosses or our family members to experience the consequences of their actions, it's actually not feminist to do that because in a way we're depriving them of their agency, of their ability to make choices however judgments we may have about the quality of those choices.

And I was telling a client, I was like, actually, as a feminist, the best thing that I can do to practice that value of equality is to let this person experience whatever the effect of their actions will be. What are your thoughts on that?

Kara: Yeah, I mean, I'm curious to hear everybody else's thoughts too. I totally think that thought makes sense. Obviously, it's just a thought, just I think so often, this is just funny because I had this whole conversation with my partner right now which is that he just went on a trip and he told me that he was - his fridge broke and he was going to leave some of the contents of his fridge in a cooler in his room.

It just was a bad plan basically. And he's like, a very grown man, he has two children he takes care of all that time, he doesn't need my assistance to run his life. But I was thinking about it because I was thinking about how I think in the past, I would have been much more like, this is obviously a dumb idea and I'm going to not only explain that to you and offer my opinion, but harp on it and try to get you to change. And instead, I was just kind of like, okay, I'm curious to see what happens, let me know at the end of the process, which of course was a terrible idea as it turned out.

But I do think that the place I see women have the most trouble with this, I'm curious what you think, we could have a whole podcast just about this is

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

that women, I find, because of the socialization around motherhood, have a very hard time allowing this to happen if they think that there will be any negative impact on their children.

So it's like, okay, well, I can't just see if my partner does or doesn't forget the lunch and the camp schedule and the whatever because then my kids are going to be impacted. And that sounds so convincing but of course, it's still about their own thought about them. Then I would be a horrible mother if my child went to camp without their swimsuit one day, or whatever the thing is.

Maggie: I was literally coaching on this last week and it was the same thing and it was, "Oh, then the children will be disappointed in their father," because their father is challenged in keeping his word around certain things. And my question to my client was, well, if their father has this tendency, they need to learn to deal with that at some point maybe, what are your thoughts about that?

Is this really helping them? It feels like we're helping. Whenever we swoop in, it always feels like we're helping. But if we go to the deeper experience, is it truly helpful to help in this way? That would be...

Kara: Your kids are going to be disappointed in you one way or another for sure. So good. We could talk about that so much more. But I want to make sure we give - Sonia, how do you feel like this people pleasing never ever shows up in sex, especially heterosexual sex at all?

Sonia: You know, when we're talking about heterosexual sexual encounters, then of course we're talking about the pleasure gap. That's the

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

first thing that glares out to me. Women that are having sexual encounters with men, their pleasure, the percentage of them enjoying themselves during the experience is in the 60th percentile, whereas men's pleasure and the same type of situation is in the 90th percentile.

So there's kind of this gap going on here and I coach on this every day, talking to women in terms of what do you want in terms of sexual intimacy? They come to me a lot of times because they're feeling like they have low libido. And I talk to them, and what they're focused on is making their partner happy and so they want their libido to increase so they can have more sex so they can make their partner happy.

And I'm like, okay, I don't hear anything about you in this equation. All I'm hearing is that you want to do something so you can make somebody else happy. What is it that you want? And I just get blank stares.

Kara: Why are you asking me this irrelevant question?

Sonia: Yeah. And I was just coaching on this in terms of somebody that was trying to keep the peace and not say that they would rather avoid sexual intimacy because the sex they're having with their partners kind of sucks. They're not having any pleasure with it.

When Maggie talks about swooping in or protecting somebody else's emotions, this is where that swooping in that I'm hearing all the time. It's like, I can't tell my partner the sex is really bad, so I'll fake an orgasm, or I'll just avoid anything sexual in nature and we just won't have sex because I couldn't bear for him to know that I don't like what he does.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

Wait, let's think this through here for a minute. So you're avoiding sex altogether because you're trying to protect somebody's feelings, which they're responsible for their own feelings anyway. But what would you like in this situation?

So constantly, there is this focus on people pleasing around sex and sexuality and not really having a concept as a woman that you can be the sexual subject, that you can be the person that deserves pleasure for pleasure's sake, and let's figure out what this is all about. And I'm laughing because I have sex toys all around my area.

Kara: She's brandishing a vibrator, you guys can't see on the podcast.

Sonia: This is about sexual pleasure for you.

Kara: I hope you do that on calls. I just remember seeing this tweet that was going around that was about the percentage of people who report they have an orgasm in their first sexual experience with somebody. I'm sure you've seen it. And it was like, women masturbating have an orgasm 90-something percent of the time, and women having a first sexual experience with another woman have an orgasm like 60-something percent of the time, and then women having a first sexual experience with a man have an orgasm like 30-something percent of the time.

And I think this is circulated as a straight men need to learn how to do this better, which amen, that's true. But also, we have to do our part of it. Women have to do their part of it, which is you have to articulate what you want. You have to learn what you want. People aren't mind-readers.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

Sonia: Exactly. I talk a lot about women having a learner's permit when it comes to their sexuality instead of having a driver's license. And they're sitting in the passenger seat waiting for somebody else to tell them about their own body and what they like and what they don't like. And they get upset with their partner if they're not doing it right.

I'm like, did you tell them where you touch or what you like? And they're not even sure what they like. I'm like, let's up-level to a license. Let's learn about your body. Let's figure out what stimulation you like, and let's learn the words to ask for what you need.

Kara: I think that's so huge and I'm curious to hear if this comes up in Sara's too, but I think there are some things we can coach ourselves to feel comfortable and move ahead. And I feel like with people pleasing, you have to just coach yourself to be like, I'm going to feel like dying and I'm going to do this anyway the first few times.

I mean, I'm somebody who you would never look at me and be like, I bet she has trouble telling people what she wants. I'm pretty out there about what I want, and even I, sometimes it's awkward. Sometimes you feel a little awkward and there's obviously a lot of sex-negative education in our society and women are socialized to see themselves as objects of desire. There's so much that goes into this sex realm specifically.

But I do feel like with people pleasing, you're not going to get to totally comfortable before you take any action. You just have to disappoint someone and see that you didn't die. And then do it again.

Sonia: And they didn't die either.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

Kara: Yeah, everybody survived.

Sonia: Everybody survived and you get to do this again and again and again. It's not a one and done. If you're having the conversation or you're dealing with the issue, it's going to take more than one time to kind of sort it out.

Kara: So good. So what about you, Sara? How does it come up? Well, you just are the people-pleasing coach, so I guess it's always. But I'm curious, so do your people all know that they're people pleasers? Are there particular areas that it comes up in? What do you see?

Sara: They know they're people pleasers but they can't figure out how to stop. They have progressed in their awareness to know they don't like it, but they just feel so compelled by the roles and the rules in their lives that they just are, and they have a tricky relationship with how they've been rewarded for keeping those roles and rules.

So the first thing that they experience is they can only find themselves in relationship to other people. I only get to use my time after I make time for everybody else, or I only get to meet my needs after I meet everybody else's needs, or I only get to do for me after everyone else is done first.

They're constantly living with this mixture of uncertainty and anxiety because at any minute, someone else could need something and throw off their plans for themselves, or their plan for the day, and it's just this constant low-level hum of anxious, uncertain, ungrounded, because they're just tethered to everyone else in their life.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

And they're constantly feeling the tug and pull of what different people want, and they're genuinely convinced I should do this, it's my job to do this, and I get rewarded for doing it. I get praised along the line of you're such a good mom, you're such a good wife, you're such a good whatever, that to untangle that, we really have to go back to where those roles and rules even came from because so many of them started for them before they even had the conscious thought like, hey, I like this role of a woman stays home and raises children.

It was just handed to them and became a part of just the way they saw the world. So that's where the Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching just blew this up for me was oh my gosh, I didn't even agree to half of this. I did not consent. And to go back and to be able to undo that and look at it like, this isn't something that I agreed to but it is something that I can actually form a new relationship with.

And so that's what we do. We just look at the way that even before they had a conscious choice in the matter, girls who are socialized as girls have all these roles and rules given to them. So we identify them, and we identify a lot of the fear and the uncertainty that comes up when they think about breaking them.

Kara: I love this point about what rewards are you getting. Because one of the things that I talk a lot about, obviously patriarchy and oppression, but of course I also come from a critical studies perspective, and not to turn this into a philosophy seminar, but if you study Foucault and his theories about power, it's like the person who's on the bottom always has some power that they're often not privy to or don't see.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

The power is not unidirectional. There are rewards and especially when we take an intersectional perspective, we can see that there are rewards to conforming in some ways because you're a member of one group, you get certain privileges that way.

So you may be oppressed by diet culture but getting the rewards of thinness. You may be, as a white woman, oppressed by patriarchy, but getting the rewards of white supremacy. There are all these different ways, and I think it's so important to see that even here.

From a psychological and a cognitive perspective, why do we keep doing something? Because we're getting some kind of reward. Whether that's affirmation, or in the sex case maybe it's avoidance of discomfort. Whatever it is, we're getting some kind of reward. And I think it's so important for people - especially because people pleasers, when we take that on as an identity, we're just like, I'm just this selfless person who just suffers so much if anyone else is unhappy.

And to be like, yeah, you're getting off on this too in your own way. You're getting something out of this, is such an important point. It's not a blame issue, but it's just seeing that you are not just helpless to your own empathy, like you are getting something out of this.

Sara: And I think what it sets up is the exact point that you wanted to ask about. When you forgo that reward, to honor and not abandon what you want, it's uncomfortable either way. It's not like it's going to feel amazing to no longer be held up as the example of what a woman should be doing in a religious community. Because if you stay home and you take care of children, have a beautiful house, and everybody - you are rewarded for

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

that. And to forgo that reward for doing something else, that's uncomfortable.

And so to be able to see that it is uncomfortable either way, but there is one type of discomfort that actually furthers your growth and moves you in the direction that you want to be going. And I don't know that you can really understand that until you see that not people pleasing also feels terrible.

Kara: Good news everybody. It's going to feel terrible either way. Sonia, I'm curious, what do you think? Do you think there's a reward that people are getting when they people please in sex? And what do you think that it is?

Sonia: I think that it's along the lines of what Sara - I think there's a lot of different rewards. But one of the rewards is along the lines of what Sara says in terms of if you have a concept of what a woman's role is and you need that role, then you can reward yourself with knowing you're a good woman and society is going to give you their blessing, that type of concept.

And if you're looking at the good girl, bad girl concept, you might be in your 40s, 50s, 60s, but still have this idea of what a good girl does in the bedroom and what a bad girl would do. All these types of things. And when you get to that point where you're ready to live your life and to focus on you and your pleasure and figure out what it is that you need in this world, yeah, I have to have the same discussion about it being uncomfortable.

Because they may sit there going, "I can't have this discussion with my partner because it upsets him or her," but they're also saying that they don't want to feel that discomfort. But when you point out to them, "But you're actually already feeling discomfort because you're not enjoying sex at all..."

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

Kara: You want to be uncomfortable with an orgasm or uncomfortable without an orgasm.

Sonia: Right. Or sometimes somebody will come to me and they'll say, "I've been having pain with sex for 20 years." That kind of thing breaks my heart. But in their mind, they think that sex is a duty. And they're doing what they should be doing and that they're good women because of this. But they're living with actual pain. And they're also missing out on all the joy and fun you can have with sex.

Kara: That's almost like that same thinking, taking that extreme. You're not supposed to enjoy sex too much, so if it hurts, even better. Not in the fun way. Even better. It's even more virtuous kind of. You're even more fulfilling your duty, and sure you're not enjoying it because it's actively uncomfortable. So fascinating. What do you think Maggie? Do you have thoughts on this kind of reward thing?

Maggie: I think there are definitely rewards, especially when you think of people who are people pleasing at work or in their jobs or in their families. They're the one that gets everything done, they're the reliable one, they're the person that everyone turns to. Ask me how I know.

So there's that feeling that you get of being that person that is sought out. And then you've completely burned out and have nothing to give to anyone because then everyone is always looking to you. So there's this reward resentment cycle that can start very easily.

And then there's also what I see a lot is not even the reward but the active pursuit of safety. This idea that if I do this, everyone will be okay and I will

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

be safe, and I will be alright. And it's the avoidance of danger. It feels like if I don't move all of these chess pieces in this exact way and get involved and over-involved in all these ways, then the world will end as we know it.

Kara: That's what women have been taught. Whether it's cultural or epigenetic, you can't have a bank account until whatever it is, 1950. You couldn't have credit cards until 1975. You did need a partner or your parent. You needed everybody to be happy with you and think you were good enough and to survive. And we haven't gotten away from that totally.

Maggie: I was reading something recently and I need to look it up and I'll send it to you when I find it, but I wish I could remember the author's name, but she was saying that people pleasing, there was inherent privilege when we think about stopping people pleasing. There are some scenarios in life where people pleasing is literally essential for our survival.

If I'm a Cuban woman that gets stopped by a cop, not in Miami because in Miami the cop is Cuban too. If I'm in Alabama or something, some other place, there's an inherent moment where people pleasing is literally a life-saving activity. So that conditioning stays with us in so many other ways and that was another thing that opened my brain to think about, oh, in what ways is it a privilege to be able to say no?

And when we have financial dependence on a partner or on a work situations and I say no to my boss, but then what are the consequences of that? We layer in that intersectionality that you taught us. It's like, oh, how can I navigate this considering all of these intersections that I have to go through?

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

Kara: I feel like that's why one of our jobs as coaches is to teach people how to discern between when an actual survival response is warranted, which for most of us is the minority of the time these days, and when we are believing that and sort of letting that take over the way that our brain works.

I've coached people so often who are like, "I have to have this job or I'll die and starve." And when we actually go through it, it's like, actually I do have those savings, or I could stay with my mom if I had to. It's like teaching people that resourcefulness.

When we talk about people pleasing, it's never a criticism. There's a reason that we developed this, and especially around sex and sexuality, people have had sexual trauma of their partners not caring what they want, or worse. So none of this is to say that there aren't reasons that we've developed this either in your personal experience, in the social experience, culturally, maybe even epigenetically.

But we're here now and learning when you want to people please because you really need it as a survival strategy and the vast majority of the time, especially for people who are listening to a coaching podcast, that that's probably not their daily existence.

Sonia: It's interesting that you talk about safety in sexuality because one of the things I focus on is women's empowerment in their ability to create their, what I call their zone of sexual safety. So it's not predicated on somebody else making them feel safe but they take it and they own it. And they have an understanding of what environment physically and emotionally that they need to create in order so that they can be

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

comfortable with owning their sexuality and do what they need to do in their life, and get away from this people pleasing.

Kara: That's so important because it goes both ways, right? Sometimes we feel unsafe because we've been people pleasing. We create a situation in which we feel unsafe because we've been people pleasing, and then we go against our boundaries or we do things we don't want to do, or we don't speak up, and then we're creating that for ourselves. So it's multidirectional.

I feel like in sex especially, it's like, you do things you don't really want to do, or you don't say no when you want. When it's people pleasing that's being activated, I feel like I have experienced this, and actually, I think this happens not in sex too.

You go along with a bunch of things that you really didn't want to say yes to, whether it's sexual or in your job or in your relationship or whatever. And then at the end, you feel so unsafe, but sometimes you feel so unsafe not because the other person is actually dangerous, but because you don't trust yourself to stick to your own boundaries, so of course you feel unsafe.

Sonia: And the only way to do that is to learn what your boundaries are and to practice saying what you need and creating that zone, that safety so that you can practice and become comfortable with it and be like, I can say - or just even get to that place where you maybe can't articulate it, but you can feel it in your body that you don't necessarily want to do something, or you don't feel safe, and trust that. And just start from that place.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

And just put a pause, put a pause on the consent, put a pause and just slow down and figure out what exactly are you not feeling comfortable about, or do you not want to do, and that it's okay to have a pause, and it's okay to figure it out.

Kara: Yeah. I love that. When you think about how we socialize kids, it's so often we're teaching them to override what they do or don't want to do. And a lot of it is don't offend so-and-so, be nice, especially for girls. It starts so early.

Sara: That is just such a powerful tool for interrupting any kind of people pleasing train that is starting to leave the station and you don't want it to. Having difficult conversations, or saying no. One of the first things that I teach is just take a pause and evaluate who am I connected to? Am I connected to these people and what they want from me, or am I connected to me? Am I connected to what they expect? Am I connected to me and what I want?

And as women, we are just so unused to that practice of hold up, let me find me in all of this and let me first go here. But having a pause is just such a powerful tool for re-evaluating. And I think that what we're told, patriarchy and roles and rules and everything is that you need to be nice, you need to be agreeable, you need to be generous, you need to be serviceable, and all of that to me feels like it just makes things go faster when what we really need to do is just pause and connect to what we want and need first and then from there, sometimes we decide to go ahead and do the thing. And other times we can make a different decision, but only after we give ourselves permission to pause.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

Kara: That's how you have to get in touch with that little voice anyway. Most people are so used to just overriding that. Like Maggie is saying, they don't realize that until 16 yeses' later when they're like, I don't fucking want to do any of this, and now I'm completely over the top.

I've noticed with myself, one of my tells is I'll say yes to something but it'll have this feeling of unreality about it. I don't really ever actually believe I'm going to go to that place or do that thing. It's so hard to articulate, but I've started to notice how to pick up on it that even as I'm saying yes, and often it's not even people pleasing.

Sometimes it is, but sometimes it's just like, me thinking I should do the thing. You can start to notice in yourself like, what are your own tells that you don't really want to do this. For me, if it seems hypothetical, I can't really imagine that I'm going to go do that, or if you're afraid of what would happen, if you feel a lot of guilt and anxiety the minute you think about saying no, learning how to spot your tells so that you can slow the process down is so important.

Maggie: That's something I see a lot is so many women have been people pleasing for so long that they've lost touch with their own delights. And something that we start off with is just finding out what do you like? What do you want? And then the smallest thing - and I tell them practice making choices. Just pick what you're going to have for dinner, pick what you're going to wear tomorrow, but deliberately, with intention.

What fills you with delight? What lights you up when you see it? And it's such an interesting thing. I had one client who - we joked our whole time

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

together. It was always what do you want? You can have anything you want if you're willing to make the tradeoffs that it requires.

And every session she was just like, this requires me to figure out what I want, doesn't it? And then we talk about something else. This requires me to figure out what I want, doesn't it? And it's just like, we've gotten so disconnected from our genuine desire that we have to then figure that out.

Kara: Yeah, because that's what people pleasing is. We're taught that it doesn't matter. Other people's desires matter. It's like, you can have an orgasm if you just happen to have one along the way to somebody else's. You can do what you want if everybody else has - I think sometimes we're operating on if nobody else in the world could ever want me to do anything else in this moment, then I can do what I want with it, which is like, impossible.

Sonia: I mean, a classic example of that is about 15% of women actually have an orgasm from penetrated sex alone, like penis in a vagina, penetrated. 85% of women need some sort of stimulation to the clitoris. But if we look at what society views as sexual intimacy, as sex, it's all about penetration. And somehow, it's supposed to be a better orgasm if penetration is involved, or if it's solely around penetration.

Kara: If the penis delivers it.

Sonia: Yeah, exactly. But 85% of women are like, this isn't cutting it for me, I need some stimulation to our clitoris. If the majority of women need that, why is it such that we are so focused on penetrated sex and the focus on the people pleasing aspect of intercourse basically? How do we define it?

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates

Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

Kara: It's like women are allowed to have anything as long as it just happens accidentally while they're doing something for somebody else. Alright, so I know that we want to make sure that we are sticking to our time, so here's what I'd love to hear from each of you. What is your best actionable tip?

We've talked about the pause, so everybody agrees on the pause. What is an additional best actionable tip you can give people who are like, yeah, this sounds like me, I don't think I'm allowed to do anything that'll make anyone else upset, or I'm crippled by this behavior? What's the first thing to practice?

Sara: I would say a lot of the women, because they're aware of people pleasing and want to stop, they beat themselves up for it. What is the matter with you? Why are you doing this? You don't want to do it. You always do this. And so they add this extra layer of judgment and contempt that just makes it harder to actually resolve the people pleasing.

And so to notice that people pleasing is not good or bad, but it just produces a certain result. And that to produce a different result, berating and blaming and criticizing yourself is unlikely to help you do that. And so to learn to watch, where am I most likely to people please, why? What need am I trying to get met by doing this? What reward am I hoping to get? What role am I fulfilling? What rule am I keeping?

And to just be so gentle and compassionate with that as a place to start from. Because what we usually do is just beat the crap out of ourselves for it and that just makes it even harder.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

Kara: Yeah, the phrase, “I always do this,” is basically never useful.

Sara: Never, ever.

Kara: So good. What about you Sonia? What you got?

Sonia: Well, I would add to what Sara’s saying. I would look at the worst-case scenario because so often we do the people pleasing because we’re afraid of looking at the worst-case scenario. And actually, finding out the worst-case scenario really isn’t that bad.

And we have in our imagination all the horrible things that could happen. And when we realize, oh, this is just a situation. Maybe somebody will call me a bitch because I’m taking care of my own needs or whatever, that’s just a circumstance. What is it that I want and what I need? And it’s okay to be pleasing myself.

And I always talk about your best lover and your first lover is always yourself. And so if you’re going to please somebody and you’re going to be focused on people pleasing, please your best lover, which is yourself. You’re always self-partnered, and so start there.

Kara: Also, so interesting. You’re always pleasing yourself, whether you’re pleasing yourself by doing what someone else wants, you can think I’m a good person, or you’re pleasing yourself by doing what you actually want. It’s really which version of that is going to be more satisfying, which is going to produce more growth, which is going to bring you closer to the life that you sort of want to have.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

I think the biggest, most important aspect to stopping people pleasing is to stop lying to yourself that it's really about the other person and how they feel. Because that keeps you feeling very altruistic about it and like you're such a good person for doing the people pleasing. And when you really have to be like, this is so that I get to feel a certain way, now would I rather have an orgasm or would I rather get to tell myself that I'm a good person for not having an orgasm? I get to decide but that's really the choice here.

Sonia: Yeah, the answer is always choose orgasm.

Kara: Always, always. Maggie, what about you? Close us out.

Maggie: So I teach a communication framework called soul-centered communication because everyone wants to communicate better in their relationships. And paradoxically, sometimes people need to stop talking. That's an episode for another day.

Kara: I don't know what you're talking about. I think articulating - this is what my partner once said to me. To know you is to know everything you're thinking.

Maggie: So one of the things that I teach is part of that soul-centered communication, the L is being loving. And loving in our culture is often associated with being softness, or things like that. And I think that loving can be very fierce. And the way that I teach loving is in communication with someone, are you being equally as loving with yourself as you are with the other person?

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

Because most of my clients can prioritize everyone else just fine and don't prioritize themselves. So when they're practicing soul-centered communication, it's like, am I being loving towards you and towards me? And what would my approach be if I prioritized my needs, my desires, my priorities, equally to yours?

Not above or below yours, but just equally to yours. So as you go out into your week, just think about am I being equally as loving towards my partner, towards my coworker, towards my friend as I am towards me? And just see where that leads you. I think you'll be happily surprised.

Kara: So I can close this off by telling you that recovering from people pleasing is possible because listening to you, I'm like, man, I got to be more loving towards my partner in our communication. I'm like yes, my thought is great, my thought about what should happen is true.

So I have gone full circle all the way, possibly too far the other way. Now I got to come back. So it is possible to recover. Alright, thank you all for coming on and sharing all of your expertise. We can never talk about this topic too much, so I really appreciate it. Have a good week, my chickens. Go out and please yourself.

—

If you're loving what you're learning in the podcast, you have got to come check out The Clutch. The Clutch is the podcast community for all things Unfuck Your Brain. It's where you can get individual help applying the concepts to your own life.

UFYB 206: People Pleasing in Sex, Marriage, and Everywhere Else: A Conversation with Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching Graduates Maggie Reyes, Sara Fisk, and Sonia Wright

It's where you can learn new coaching tools not shared on the podcast that will blow your mind even more. And it's where you can hang out and connect over all things thought work with other podcast chickens just like you and me. It's my favorite place on earth and it will change your life, I guarantee it. Come join us at www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. That's unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. I can't wait to see you there.