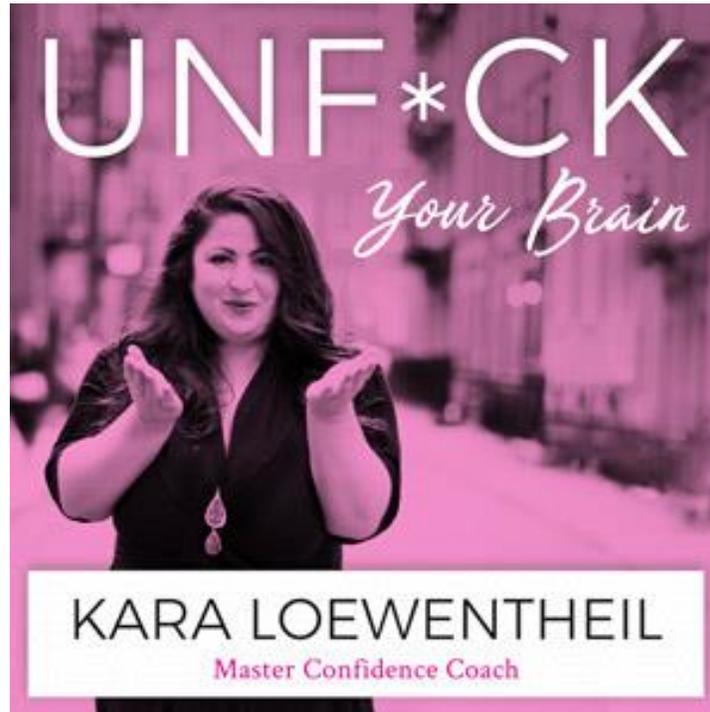


UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

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.

Okay my chickens, so I want you to imagine this. You are so very close to someplace you want to go. Maybe it's Hawaii, or maybe it's an orgasm. It's an orgasm. We're talking about orgasms.

You're so close to an orgasm, and then your brain starts saying shit like, "You're taking too long. What if I smell or taste weird? Did we turn off the stove? I just want to go to bed. What about that email?"

We've all been there, some of us more often than others. On this episode of the podcast, I am talking about orgasm-blocking thoughts. This is a release of an interview that I originally did on Girl Boner Radio, which, quite the name, with August McLaughlin, who is amazing.

And this was actually quite a while ago. We recorded this episode and we've never shared it here. And so I'm super excited for you all to hear. I think especially as it gets, at least here in the northern part of the Western hemisphere, it's winter, it's getting cold, we're all spending more time inside.

It's cuffing season. I don't really know what that is, but that's something the young people say. Probably not actually. That's probably something 35-year-olds say and now I'm 40 and don't even know what the young people say.

But obviously our brains are our most important sex organs. They have a lot to do with how we experience sex and what kind of thought patterns can

UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

either kind of help us enjoy or get in the way. And of course, patriarchy is a huge, huge influence on the way that women think about sex and themselves and their bodies and is such a huge impediment to having the amazing sex life that you are totally allowed and deserve and entitled and capable of having if that's something you want.

Not everybody does, but personally, I'm into having a good sex life and some of you probably are too. So I think you're going to find this interview super helpful.

The relationship between our brains and sex and all the ways that our brains get in the way of us having sex and sometimes that's that we want to and our brains get in the way, sometimes it's our brains making us not want to.

Sometimes the way that we're thinking about a situation makes us lose desire for someone or something that we actually want to have desire for. But because we are not creating that desire on purpose with our thinking, we don't experience it.

It's one of the biggest misconceptions that I coach on in The Clutch all the time is the idea that the other person causes our sexual desire for them, or causes us to feel sexy, or causes us to feel desirable, or causes us to feel sexual. There's so much to unpack in this.

I'm recording a whole module about it for The Clutch because women are socialized to believe so many damaging, alienating things about sex that we don't even know how to relate to ourselves as sexual beings often outside of our sexual relationships with other people, and especially if we are straight and have sex or we are straight, bi, pansexual, whatever, but if we have sex with men.

UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

Because of the way that we're socialized around the male gaze and sexuality. So, so many women feel like they need their partner to behave a certain way to feel sexy and desirable. If they start to lose desire for a partner or a certain kind of sex or whatever it is, they think that that's just a natural thing that happens that they can't control.

All the scripts in our society around this are so fucked up, that it's natural to have a lot of sexual enthusiasm in the beginning, which makes people who don't feel like there's something wrong with them. And then it's natural to lose it and everybody's just supposed to live with waning sexual desire for the rest of their relationships.

There's just so much stuff going on there. So this episode is really going to help you but I also want you to know that this is something that you can work on. And if you want to work on it, now is the time because we are closing The Clutch tomorrow.

The Clutch is open for you to join today and tomorrow and then that is it until April 2022. We will not be doing a public opening of The Clutch again for whatever that is, almost six months.

So if you want your sex life to be better before mid-next year, now is the time. You will be shocked how much you can improve your sex life by changing the way that you're thinking about it and changing your mindset.

But you got to get into The Clutch to do that. It's not going to happen on its own, it's not going to happen magically. This is a great episode. This alone is not going to solve your problem if this is something you struggle with. You have to learn how to actually change those thoughts.

UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

And whether it's sex or anything else in your life that you have been thinking just is the way it is, you have to feel the way it feels, you can't do anything about it, you can't change it, you just have to suffer, whatever that area of your life is, I promise you that you can change it and you can change your relationship to it.

You can change so much more about your brain and your life than you would ever think is possible, but you have got to come join The Clutch and let me help you with that because trying to do it on your own is just so, so difficult. And there's no good reason for it.

When we are trying to solve our own problems, we can't see our own blind spots. We can't see outside of the way that we're already thinking. Self-coaching is a beautiful thing and it is a skill I teach you to do correctly and powerfully in The Clutch.

But there is no substitute for, certainly in the beginning of the thought work process, getting that outside perspective that is going to help you understand what is going on with your brain and help you learn how to apply self-coaching tools correctly so that they work for you.

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There's no reason for you to have to wait to make your life better. So come join The Clutch today or tomorrow only and then we are closed. Here's how you can do it. You can go to unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. You can also text your email to +1-347-934-8861. That's +1-347-934-8861. We will send you the link.

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UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

All the questions you have are answered at that link if they're not, you can always shoot us an email. We are happy to answer all your questions. You can read stories from women who are in The Clutch and the work that they have done.

I just know so deep in my bones what it feels like to feel like there are parts of your life that are making you miserable and that are out of your control. And the truth is that the way you feel about them is not out of your control. But this is not a skill of changing our thoughts and feelings that comes naturally to us.

We are not taught it anywhere else. There's no way to just magically figure it out yourself. You just got to come learn, just like if you decided that you wanted to take up fencing. You'd know you got to go to fencing classes. I don't know why fencing is what came to mind, but there you go. That's what it's like.

So please do not do yourself the disservice of creating more misery for yourself when you don't have to. There's such a fucked up version of capitalist patriarchy that makes women feel like they should be able to figure everything out on their own, they shouldn't need help, and they should not invest their time and money in anything that is for them.

It has to be for other people to be valid or worthwhile. The truth is that when you work on your own shit, it actually is better for the world. It's better for all the people around you, your family, your friends, your partner, your kids, your colleagues, whoever it is, your employees.

It is better for other people, but also you deserve to invest in yourself with your time, with your energy, with your attention, and yes, with your money. You deserve to learn the tools that are going to help you live a life that is meaningful and positive and feels good to you.

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UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

And the idea that you have to earn that, that's the fucking patriarchy and fuck that noise. That's what we're doing in The Clutch. So text your email to 347-934-8861 or you can sign up at unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch. This is not a drill. This is your last chance until well into next year.

So get those little fingers texting y'all, I'll see you inside. And let's get into orgasm thoughts.

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August: Do you ever find yourself thinking more about your appearance than pleasure during sex, or worry about a partner's pleasure more than your own, or worry about orgasm taking too darn long? Bonus episode that ends with a girl boner homework assignment I have for you, so keep listening to the end.

I'm excited to share my chat on orgasm-blocking thoughts with Kara Loewentheil. If you've ever listened to her podcast, *Unf*ck Your Brain*, you know that Kara is a powerhouse. As a feminist confidence coach, she teaches women how to overcome insecurity and anxiety by identifying ways society has taught us to feel insecure, and then by using a concrete method to change these thoughts to feel really confident.

When I asked Kara about her personal journey, she told me she was working as an attorney in the social justice spheres, and while that fulfilled her to a certain degree, she had this basal level of anxiety all the time. She worried about ways other people perceived her and grappled with body image issues.

So being a seeker, she dove into therapy and yoga and meditation and tried a whole range of approaches to get to the root of these issues. All of

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

UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

this led not only to a ton of personal growth for herself, but to this platform that merges cognitive psychology-based techniques with feminist theory, and is impacting so many people.

Before our conversation, I had read an article Kara penned for Mind Body Green called 4 Ways You Can Hack Your Brain for Better Sex. I love this topic and wanted to know why she chose to explore it.

Kara: A lot of feminism is rooted in the understanding that people socialized as women are taught to view themselves as sexual objects and to understand their sexuality as not being an internal lived experience, but we're taught to believe that our experience of desire should spring from being desired by someone else.

And so in that sense, we're this object that is supposed to be ignited by someone else's gaze, which is not how I think people socialized as male in our culture are socialized to think about sex. They are socialized to believe that their sexuality is internal, it springs from within, and to me, that's the source of so many of women's body image issues.

Of course, you add in all of the unrealistic depictions in the media, you just add in the anthropological aspect, which is that in any human society, people are obsessed with food and rituals around food and bodies, and body modification.

It's just a human thing. And then whatever is hard to achieve is valued and associated with eliteness. So when there's not enough food, being fat is considered beautiful and unattainable. And now we live in a society where there is a ton of food, and so being unrealistically thin is considered to be attractive and unattainable.

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UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

There's so many intersecting forces, but when you put all that together - and then sex is obviously an outgrowth of that too. How you feel in your body, how you think about your body, what you think when you look at your body. If you spend all day thinking about how your body should look different and you ate too many calories or whatever else, of course you don't feel sexy at the end of the day.

People socialized as women don't know how to connect to that within themselves and what does it mean to feel sexy in a way that really has nothing to do with whether anybody else looking at you thinks you're sexy.

August: Yes. And that really does seem to take an awareness of what our thought patterns are, which I know you talk a lot about, and some of the limiting thoughts. And some that become so second nature because of these cultural messages that you aren't even aware that we're thinking them.

I loved your article that you wrote for Mind Body Green. You talk about different hacks for your brain for better sex. Why was that important to you to discuss actually challenging those brain waves, those thoughts we have?

Kara: Because I think that we tend to think about sex as a biological experience. Like we're attracted to certain people and they touch us the right way or the wrong way, and then we get off. It's like math. The building blocks.

And I totally believe that there is some element of whether you want to call it pheromones or sexual chemistry, whatever it is, I have certainly been surprised by that in my own life. I think we've all kissed someone we thought we were really attracted to and felt nothing, and then kissed someone we were kind of meh about and it was amazing.

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UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

Some of that is there, but I just think we really underestimate how much our thought process impacts our feelings of desire, our interpretations of what's happening during sex, especially for people who are socialized as women or who are socialized to be pleasers in some way, or worry more about the other person's pleasure.

August: Kara told me that all of those thoughts can really impact how we feel about and experience sex. And while she's done a lot of self-work in this arena, she was also lucky to have had a pretty sex-positive upbringing.

Kara: It was like a shock to me when I found out that there were people who have a hard time orgasming because they can't turn off their brain.

August: Kara realized that the work she does with folks to unfuck their brains really applies to sex and pleasure. She told me that working on those thoughts and beliefs, really understanding and working through them is some of the most empowering work we can do.

Kara: Sometimes you're in a relationship with somebody and you don't feel that much desire for them, but you don't want to break up with them. You would like to feel more desire for them but you think, "Well, there's no way to do that, or we have to go through the check list of well, we tried lingerie and we tried candles," whatever you're supposed to do.

And so to know that you actually can create desire and create the feeling of being desirable for yourself, again, the stereotype is always that the masculine partner wants more sex than the feminine partner. I don't think that is true.

A lot of my clients struggle with it the other way around, and they think they can't feel desirable or sexy because their partners has a lower libido than

UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

they do. And so those brain hacks I think are so important for both things. It's both how to make actual sex you're having better, but also let's say your partner doesn't want to have more actual sex and you can't control that, how can you still get some of the satisfaction that you're attributing to the sex you want to have without having to have it?

August: Completely. Such wonderful points. And I hear from so many people who internalize lower desire in a partner as there's something wrong with me, there's something wrong with my body. But I think so many people struggle with that comfort around being naked, which I think often has to do with something deeper.

And a lot of times it's more emotional nudity I guess you could say, it's vulnerability as well. But there's so much pressure to look certain ways, and if you're sitting there thinking about how your butt looks or how your boobs look, the size of your penis or whatever it is, it's so disruptive. So one of the thoughts you talk about breaking this negative pattern is worrying about how you look naked. How can we change that pattern?

Kara: I think there are a couple of good hacks. On the body image level, anything you do to work on your body image will help. And so neutral or baby step thoughts. I always say they're not inspiring enough to be on an Instagram post, but they actually will help.

If your thought about your stomach is, "My stomach is disgusting, I have to hide it," yeah, it would be great if you went immediately to thinking, "I'm a beautiful goddess." But most people can't jump that far so they just give up.

August: So she recommends starting with very neutral descriptions like, "This is a human stomach." While you're at it, it's also important to consider what you're seeing and consuming in your daily life.

UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

Kara: I also think one of the phenomenons of body image that we have good studies on are that visual exposure to traditional mainstream media with unrealistic body types promotes body dissatisfaction. And that visual exposure to real people's bodies and bodies that look like yours promotes visual satisfaction. So looking at photos of people who look like you, and particularly if you can find them, naked photos.

August: For that, you can check out ethical feminist porn, body positive influencers, and a website Kara recommended called The Breast Gallery. It features hundreds of photos of natural breasts and really shows what a vast range there is and how unrealistic and limited many images we're fed often are.

Before you start this work, seeking out photos of naked people who have body parts that match up to one that you may be struggling with, Kara said to prepare yourself. It's not going to be a garden of roses.

Kara: This is not going to feel great immediately because the first 10, 15 times you do it, what's going to come up is your own brain's disgust for yourself. So you're going to think that it looks gross.

August: But if you can keep doing it, she said, your thoughts and perceptions will gradually improve. And of course, if you are in the deep depths of body image challenges, first of all, solidarity, I've been there in the past, you may want to seek some guidance and support from a qualified therapist. Kara herself used to have a lot of body insecurities, and she worked through them in stages.

Kara: So I worked on believing that men - I'd have to be straight - that men would be attracted to me on dates or whatever. But then my brain was always like, yes, but as soon as you take off your clothes he's going to know.

UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

And then one day I was like, wait, we live in the age of the internet. So I'm a fat woman, people on your podcast may not know that. If this man likes to go on dates with fat women, he's probably searched for porn of them. He knows what it's going to look like. For better or worse, this is one of the plus sides of porn, nobody doesn't know what the thing they like looks like. It's all just your own self-critical thoughts.

So that's one of the things I also - this person is attracted to me. Humans are really good at visualizing other humans naked. That's one of our favorite things to do. If they're attracted to you, they like what you look like. And if you've had sex with them before and they came back for more, then obviously they like it. But we don't think that. We're like, well, they're just putting up with my gross body because of my sparkling personality.

August: Yeah, those are such good points. I think especially in our culture in the US, because there's this shroud of secrecy still, this weird sort of - there's forward movement but there's also backlash and we're still puritanical in some ways where the body is taboo. And so we're searching even more. If it were normalized, I don't think we would be so I need to Google what this kind of body part looks like because we wouldn't be so fixated.

Kara: Yeah, and because we're so exposed and saturated with a pornified version of sex and everybody only looking one way. So on one hand it's like, women in bikinis with fake breasts selling cars in outfits that are so revealing that in the past even your husband wouldn't see you that way. But it's all of a certain version. It's not a true diversity. So we have the worst of both world in that way.

August: Completely. What's another really common orgasm-blocking thought, aside from about physical appearance? We talked a little bit about sex drive and desire.

UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

Kara: Well, I see a lot of discomfort with - and again, I tend to work with people who have been socialized as women, so obviously patriarchy and racism and sexism is bad for everybody but this is the thing that I work on. So I tend to see a lot of more concern for the other person's pleasure than your own, and I think that that's socialized.

So then there's a lot of discomfort. A lot of I don't want the person to go down on me because it's uncomfortable for me to just receive pleasure. Or I start to worry that I'm taking too long, or he doesn't like or she doesn't like how I taste or look.

It all stems I think from this - some of us are raised to believe that we are entitled to pleasure and that can be toxic masculinity run amuck, the idea that you're entitled to pleasure regardless of what the other person wants.

Then the flip side of it is not believing that you're entitled to pleasure at all. And that even if someone's trying to give it to you, you shouldn't take it or your pleasure's not important or it's more important that they're pleased, and you're worrying if they're pleased that you're pleased.

So I see a lot of that. It's a sort of discomfort with not being the person to be providing pleasure at all times. And then that just completely is a total orgasm blocker because you're like, it's taking too long.

August: Which of course only makes it more difficult to reach and experience orgasm. If you relate to that, Kara has a hack for that too.

Kara: Well, one of the things I recommend thinking - this is a neutral step thought kind of because it sort of accepts the premise that you should worry about the other person's pleasure, but that's where people are sometimes. It is giving your partner pleasure to give you pleasure.

UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

So you are giving them pleasure. It's never actually, in a good sexual relationship at least, very rarely is one person doing something that they're like, this is about equal to filing my taxes but I'm just doing it for the other person.

Even if they're not into that particular act, they're still doing it because they think it's sexy when you're excited. Or they want to give you that experience. So that's the first step I recommend is thinking I am giving this other person pleasure. They're getting pleasure by pleasing me just the way that I do. When I please them, it's pleasurable for me.

And then I think the second one is there's all this deeper thought work that's not even just about sex but is about we live in a culture that's very influenced by capitalism and by puritan literally religious thoughts from the founding. And so we have a whole mess of thoughts I think about pleasure and pleasure being sinful or bad or lazy or indulgent and having to earn pleasure.

The tendrils extend out far beyond sex. They really impact sex because sex is an activity where you are not really - unless you're trying to get pregnant, you're not going to produce anything other than pleasure.

August: You mentioned having gone through some struggles with your own body image but that you grew up in a sex-positive household. I'm curious how all of this work with clients and with *Unf*ck Your Brain*, your podcast, how has all of that impacted your sense of self?

Kara: My entire relationship with myself is different. At the core of what I really teach people is that the relationship with yourself is the one that matters most. It's really the only one you're ever having. Your relationship with other people are happening in your own brain.

UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

True confidence isn't - I think really true confidence deep down is not even thinking I'm amazing, although that's part of it. It's really like, I've got my own back. I am not going to turn on myself, I'm not going to abandon myself, I'm not going to throw myself under the bus based on what I think someone else thinks about me.

And I'm sort of going to be here for myself and I know that I can manage whatever thoughts and feelings and experiences I encounter. To me, that's the core of the piece I feel about being a human that I think most people don't ever get to experience because they don't know about this kind of work. It's a little vague but I don't know if that answers your question.

August: It does. I think it does, and it's important I think and helpful to hear about your growth because I think sometimes when we want to change thought patterns and we want to improve our lives in the way that approach pleasure and things like that, it's hard sometimes to imagine what the rewards will be, other than not feeling sucky. You know what I mean?

Kara: You don't even know what feeling good would be.

August: Yeah, so what's motivating me? And it just seems like you have grown so much personally but then also professionally. And I think a lot of people admire and respect the fact that you do share so openly about vulnerable topics.

Kara: Yeah, I think it all boils down to not being afraid.

August: That doesn't mean she doesn't ever feel fear but it's different because she trusts herself. She told me about a sex-related example from back before she started working on her thoughts and beliefs about herself.

UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

Kara: If I had sex with someone and then they didn't call me back, I would immediately throw myself under the bus. It was like, oh, this is a problem, something went wrong, and it's my fault. This is because of you, body, you're the wrong body, and you don't look the way you should and that's why this happened.

So that's what I mean by turn on yourself. You immediately blame all of the thoughts and feelings and suffering you're having on yourself and on your body and you are willing to sell yourself out for someone else's good opinion of you.

And now, if somebody doesn't want to see me again after a date or after sex or whatever else, I 100% not just know intellectually but feel that that has nothing to do with me. That is their thoughts and they were supposed to come into my life for whatever it was, one night or six weeks or six years, and that whatever unfolded was what was supposed to unfold.

Not in a like, God, fate way. Just literally that's what happened so that's what was supposed to happen. Couldn't have been any different because that's what happened. I would never blame myself for that or abandon myself, try to get their approval. I always have my own back.

August: Here is the homework I promised. Turn yourself on first. This is helpful if you've dealt with this orgasm-blocking thought, "It's taking too long." If you've been there, you know exactly what I mean.

You're so concerned that too much time is ticking by for you to experience orgasm that it's even harder to get there. So before you next engage in sex with a partner, intentionally turn yourself on. Read an erotic story, watch a spicy film, insert a small vibrator or dildo into your vagina or rear, play with yourself with your fingers and lube, or close your eyes and fantasize.

UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

Practicing patience and not fixating on orgasm can be very valuable too of course, but I'm also all for claiming our orgasms. Desiring and going after them as we so choose.

So give yourself that time, the space, and the permission before any partner play begins. I can almost promise that you'll experience orgasm quicker and also a lot more powerfully.

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UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

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UFYB 215: Orgasm-Blocking Thoughts with August McLaughlin

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