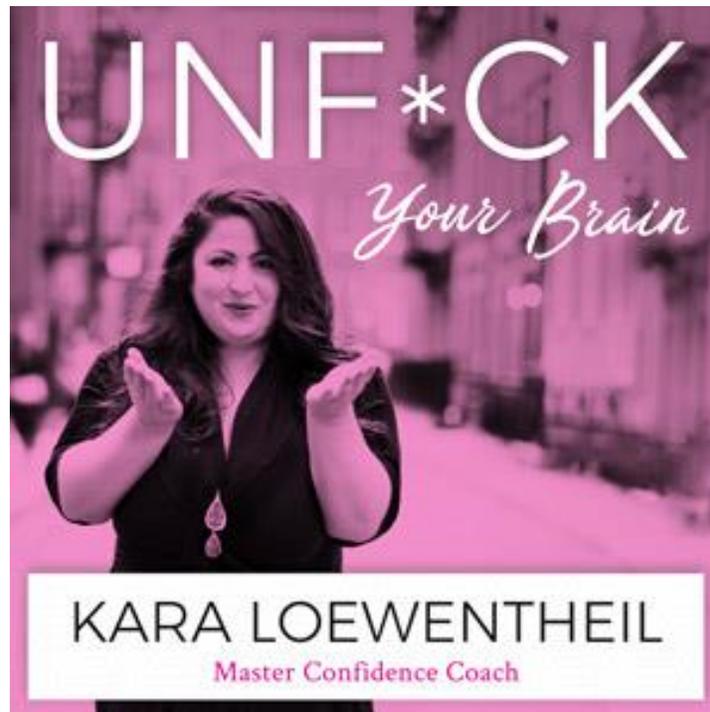


# UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

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.

Alright my chickens, it's almost New Year's Eve. 2021 is almost over, even though most of us have not recovered from 2020 yet or possibly 2019. Tomorrow is New Year's Eve if you're listening to this episode the day it comes out.

And here's the thing; this time of year, you might expect a life coach to talk a lot about how to set and achieve an amazing resolution and how you can use thought work to make sure you finally do lose those 20 pounds or go to the gym five times a week or whatever.

Now, anything I teach you can use to change your habits. But I'm not a big fan of New Year's resolutions. I really don't think that the way they're mostly done is useful. And if you've been a listener of the podcast for a while, you may not be surprised to hear that actually I think most New Year's resolutions are not really resolutions at all.

Because I don't think that we are actually most of the time resolved to do them, or resolute about doing them, or any other version of the word that is the root of resolution. We mostly are just pretending that we're going to do a thing that we pretend every year that we're going to do.

Because it's always fun to dream about things that future you is going to do, even when you know you probably won't do it. In other words, New Year's resolutions are often perfectionist fantasies. If you have listened to that episode of the podcast, that term is going to be familiar.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

If you haven't, that's fine because in this episode, I am sharing a conversation I had with Victoria Myers a couple of years ago on the Nourishing Women Podcast where we talk all about how and why most New Year's resolutions are perfectionist fantasies and what that means.

What is the problem with having a resolution that's a perfectionist fantasy? And what can you do instead? The truth is that humans I think thrive on ritual. Often there's a reason that we have so many holidays and rituals. They help structure our experience of time, they help us locate ourselves in our lives.

And when you are trying to change something in your life, it can be helpful to have a ritual around the commitment to that and a sort of set period of time you're tracking it. But those are all just the circumstances and none of them are going to create the action that you want if your thoughts and feelings are not coming from the right place.

And so many New Year's resolutions are really just fantasies that are coming out of low self-worth or self-loathing or self-rejection. And so they don't work. And so in this episode, in this conversation, we really get into what is going on when we have a New Year's resolution that is a perfectionist fantasy and why that's a problem, and how you can set resolutions if you want to, in a way that is more concrete and productive and helpful.

So I personally don't really set resolutions but it's okay if you want to obviously. You don't need my permission to do anything. But make sure that you understand what's going on with your resolutions, why you're setting them the way you are, and how you can structure them.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

I set goals and resolutions all the time. I just don't happen to use new years as the time I'm doing it. But if you do, that's totally cool. But you want to understand what you're doing and why to make sure you actually do them.

So this episode is going to help you really understand what are my motivations in making this resolution, where is it coming from, am I framing this in a way that is going to help me get it done, or am I actually being counterproductive here, and how can I create a structure and a goal and a resolution that will actually facilitate me changing my behavior.

That is the \$64,000 question. And that is what we talk about in this episode. So let's get into it.

—

Victoria: Hello Kara. Welcome to the show.

Kara: Hi Victoria, thanks for having me.

Victoria: Thank you so much for being here. I can't tell you how excited I am about your conversation. When I was sent your information, I was like who is this person, I must go follow them immediately and I downloaded your podcast and I'm just really excited about this conversation, so thank you for being here with us.

Kara: Yeah, I can't wait.

Victoria: Awesome. So just to give us a brief introduction, I know we're going to get into your story today, but just tell us a little bit about who you are and the work that you do.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Kara: I'm a certified master life coach and I work with feminist women who are experiencing a lot of anxiety, stress, insecurity, overwhelm, all those kinds of features of modern life as a woman. I work with anybody who identifies as a woman or was socialized as a woman.

But basically, I teach women how to identify the ways in which socialization, meaning what you absorb from the people and media and school and everything around you, the society you grew up in, how that impacts your brain, how it changes and creates the way that you think about yourself in ways that sort of oppress you and hold you back and make you insecure and unsure of yourself.

And then I teach them how to literally change their thought patterns, take advantage of the brain's ability to change itself, to produce really authentic, true confidence. Because that can only come from changing the way that you think about yourself.

Victoria: And with that said, I'm already so thrilled about this conversation because I might be an expert in that perspective from a food and wellness, nutrition piece. But I think how it manifests in other areas of our lives, it's just so important to have these kinds of conversations.

So, I'm so excited. I think this is really, really going to resonate with my people. I want to start though by now that we know a little bit about who you are, your journey to me is a very fascinating one because you went to Harvard Law school, you're a lawyer, and now you're a master certified life coach and run your own business, which sounds like a really amazing successful business, which love that part too. So I want to know like, why did you switch? How did you make that switch? What was that journey like?

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Kara: Yeah, just your normal life transition.

Victoria: No big deal.

Kara: Exactly what my Jewish parents were hoping for. I have always been a professional feminist basically. I've never had a job that wasn't that in some way. But I kind of came up in the reproductive rights and reproductive justice movements really.

And so I went to law school in order to be a reproductive rights lawyer and I did that. I sort of accomplished that goal and I had a very prestigious academic and legal career.

The reason that I mention that it was prestigious is that it was sort of this very powerful experience of rising to the top of a field, accomplishing the things that I thought would make me feel proud of and good about myself, like first getting into Harvard Law school, and then graduating with honors.

And not feeling good about myself, alright, if I could just get a clerkship, that's the first selective thing after law school, then I got a federal appeals court clerkship, which is the selective one to get. And then I still felt insecure.

I was like, okay, well, I'm sure once I get the one fellowship in the country in my topic area for the year, then I'm going to feel smart and good. It was continually setting these really high achievement goals, accomplishing them, and after - you do that once and it doesn't work, and you're like, alright, maybe it's the next one.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

You do that four, five, six times, then I went into academia, which is even more selective. I kept doing that. And eventually you have to start being like, you know, I don't think accomplishments are going to make me confident. There's a gap here, this isn't making sense.

I was told this is the way to become confident and feel good about myself, but it's not working. So I had always been interested in psychology and self-help and really philosophy. I consider what I do to be kind of philosophy in its own way.

Philosophy is always what is life about, how can we live it better, what is meaning, how do we create it. So I've always been interested in those things, and then I think once I had spent enough time in the legal field and gotten all those brass rings and still felt terrible about myself all the time and still had a lot of disordered eating going on and still hated my body and still always felt like an imposter and people are going to figure out I wasn't really smart enough, all of that, I just finally was like, this is not - I have to take a different approach to this.

And I happened to find - I think I found my teacher when I was ready to hear it. And she's a life coach, her name is Brooke Castillo. And so her work really kind of opened the door for me and felt like taught me - I'm sure someone had said to me before that your thoughts are what create your feelings, but I just hadn't really understood.

So when it came around again and I was ready for it, it just blew my mind open. And then one thing leads to another and all of a sudden you're quitting your law teaching job to become a life coach.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Victoria: What a beautiful story though. I feel like it's going to resonate with so many people because I do think a lot of us get into careers and we accomplish our goals and then it's like a now what sensation. Not that they need our permission slip to do anything, but a permission slip, if we all transitioned to what we love, it really can be an empowering thing.

Something you said that I think is really powerful to understand is how our thoughts and feelings and your thoughts turn into feelings and those impact the actions that we take in our lives, could you share a little bit more about how our belief systems impact our actions and how we show up in the world?

Kara: Yeah, totally. Can I say one more thing about the - something you said really resonated, which is we're always looking for that - so many of us have accomplished things thinking like, okay, I'm going to get to this place where I'm going to finally feel good enough.

And it's this very future-oriented thinking of I just have to get there and then everything will be okay and I'll finally feel okay. And I think that comes up so much in eating disorders, in orthorexia, I know in my own kind of - in diet culture in general.

That's what the whole premise of diet culture is, is if you just change your body enough, if you just restrict enough, if you just are "healthy" enough, you'll finally get to this place where you have achieved perfection and feel good about yourself. And it's that same problem.

Victoria: Thank you for tying that into my people. That's so true.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Kara: So yes, thoughts, feelings, actions. So this is sort of a, in the modern world, insight of cognitive behavioral psychology. But I think humans have been talking about the same stuff for thousands of years. The Greek philosophers talked about the same stuff, the Stoic philosophers talked about the same things.

And Eastern meditation and Buddhist traditions talk about the same things, but so basically, the idea is that most of us are raised to think that our thoughts, our ideas about things, our opinions, the sentences in our minds are just us objectively observing what's going on. And that things outside of us cause our feelings.

I would say those are the two biggest mistaken premises we have. Because in truth, we are not - we think we're like a camera that just records what's happening around us. That's not true at all. Our brain is constantly in the process of analyzing and evaluating and creating meaning out of everything we see and hear and read and taste and whatever, even to the extent of what we visually think we perceive is not just a reflection of literally light bouncing off the object out there.

Our brain actually translates it for us, which is why people can have such distorted body image, for example. So we are not just observers. We are actually creators and interpreters and evaluators of what's out there, and our thoughts are our interpretation and evaluation of what's happening.

And it's those thoughts that cause our feelings. So we think, well, somebody did this thing, so I feel this way. But no, there's this thing in the middle that does all of that evaluating and meaning-making, and that is your brain. That is your thoughts.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Your brain is what sees or hears the thing that happened and then develops an opinion and a thought about it, and that's what causes your feeling.

Victoria: I really like this because I think what happens is we have a thought, and I'm going to say a body image or food thing because that's...

Kara: I use those all the time too because I did a lot of work in this area with this myself.

Victoria: Yeah, so we have a thought like, "My body is bad or I don't like this part of my body," and/or, "I shouldn't eat this, I should eat that." I think it's so important to understand a lot of this is ingrained cultural conditioning. It's not actually our belief systems. It's what we've been taught to believe. Would you say that connects to what you're describing here?

Kara: Yeah, 100%. I mean, think about how often people say, "I feel fat."

Victoria: I use that one all the time because people say that. I'm like, that's not an actual...

Kara: That's not a feeling.

Victoria: That's not a feeling. What is it that you actually feel?

Kara: Number one, it's a thought. You might have the thought, "I'm fat." But really, what it is is a way of expressing a whole range of unconscious thoughts you have that are making you uncomfortable about your body. But you've been socialized to just associate any kind of physical discomfort and insecurity with weight and size.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

And so that's how you express it. So absolutely, I think it's so fascinating looking at our bodies, I think it's actually a really deep level of this work because the first level of the work is understanding that when you look in the mirror and see your body, and then you have a thought like, "My thighs are disgusting," that that's not an objective observation.

That is a thought you have. Other people would have different thoughts about your thighs. But the next level is understanding that you're literally not even seeing your thighs correctly.

You are not - whatever size you think your thighs are is not necessarily actually the size they are. Your thoughts about your body literally will impact what you see. What your eye will focus on, what parts of the image your brain will bring into hyper-focus for you and tell you to pay attention to.

There's a million little bits in an image. What you'll focus on, what you'll see, how you'll see it proportional to the rest. And I'm not just talking about people who have a diagnosis of body dysmorphia. We all have this to a lesser extent. You start to look different to yourself when you change your thoughts about how you look.

Victoria: Absolutely. Oh my gosh, yes, I couldn't - I wish I could be screaming from the rooftops yes. So someone who is listening and they're like, okay, well shoot, that's me, I have distorted body image, I definitely feel like I look a certain way and my thoughts are extremely negative and extremely - almost obnoxious in the way that they shout at me.

What does someone do to work towards changing their actions and their thoughts? How does this tie in for you at least in your work of helping people to accept and love their bodies?

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Kara: So I think that with everything, the way that I teach, I like to teach there's the kind of theory and concept to help you understand why your brain is this way, and then there's what are we going to do about it.

So from the theory and concept side, it's helpful to understand the history of diet culture. We don't have to go into it on this whole podcast, but I have a whole podcast episode where I talk about it. There's a very specific - in America, very specific racist history to body image.

Victoria: Absolutely. And they are aware. We've had that conversation on the show.

Kara: Awesome. I have not listened to all your episodes I'm afraid. So just thinking from that perspective, it's one thing when you think thinness is just objectively attractive. It's another thing when you think women's magazines made this up in 1835 to justify slavery. It's a very different background to the idea, to why do you even have the idea that thin is good in the first place.

So I always think that's helpful just to - I think that part of the work is important to loosen your attachment a little bit, to make you even willing to consider a different perspective. My body image is one of the first areas I did a lot of this work on, I really developed my body of work and method on, and it is an area where I think the most important thing you can do is learn this technique that I call the thought ladder.

You may have heard of them called - sometimes they're called baby step thoughts, sometimes they're called neutral thoughts. But basically what I've found with body image stuff was that a lot of people - this was also five

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

years ago. Body positivity has I think changed and gotten a little bit more realistic in some ways now.

But it was like my options were like, okay, well, most of the world telling me I'm disgusting and my own brain doing that, or there's people being like, love your body, and me being like, I'm far away from loving my body. We're not even in the same zip code right now, that is not a feasible solution to me right now.

And so I really used a lot of very neutral thoughts. So the example I always give but which I will give forever because I just think it's a really useful one is like, I used to have a lot of thoughts about my stomach, a lot of very negative thoughts.

And I was totally one of those people like - I just want all your listeners to understand, I get it. I'm not saying I occasionally felt bad about myself. I'm saying my brain was preoccupied all day every day for 25 years thinking about what I had eaten, what I was going to eat, if I was going to workout, when was I going to lose weight, why was I too fat, why was my skin like this, why was my hair frizzy, when was I going to finally get it right and be happy, all the time.

So I had a lot of negative thoughts about my stomach. And so the thought I started practicing was, "This is a human stomach." That's it. The beauty of a neutral thought is that you cannot argue with it.

So much of what happens is when we try to jump from a negative thought, like my stomach is disgusting, you try to jump to my stomach is beautiful, your brain is like, I have 37 objections to that, I'm going to tell them all to you right now.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

And you don't believe it, so you don't get any emotional payoff. Your brain is just a big dopamine reward loop. It's just like training a puppy. You got to give it a treat, or else it's not going to practice what you want it to practice.

So you don't get any emotional payoff or any relief when you try to believe something that's too far that you don't believe, and then you give up on the whole project. Whereas if you're thinking my stomach is disgusting and then you practice every time you notice that happening, thinking, "This is a human stomach," number one, you're occupying your brain.

It literally can't think two things at once. So if you just repeat that, like a little mantra, it just gives your brain something to do. Number two, it's not going to feel amazing, but it's going to feel slightly less terrible. So you get a little bit of relief, and that is a little bit enough of a reward to show your brain that it's worth doing this.

And three, you really can't argue with that as much. Of course your brain will still have negative thoughts. I'm not saying that when you practice a neutral thought, all your negative thoughts disappear. This is a practice over time.

But practicing really neutral thoughts is incredibly powerful for body image because it is a human stomach. You can't argue with that. It is one. Or I would practice thoughts like, "Other people have stomachs like this." Again, I'm not going too far.

I still don't like it or other people's stomachs that looked like it. But it still is sort of occupying my brain with a new thought and it's moving me one little step up what I call the thought ladder. That's how you move from negative to positive thoughts is one little step at a time.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Victoria: I'm dying over this conversation because I think so many people can relate. I really appreciate you mentioning the body positive movement I think has shifted a lot, I agree. But there's still a lot of just love your body, just love it as it is, and it's really challenging. And also, I think it's unfair for a lot of people who have experienced trauma, weight stigma. There's just a lot more to the conversation.

Kara: It's a lot of size two blonde people telling you to love your body the way it is.

Victoria: Exactly. So I think this is actually an approachable conversation with what exactly this looks like. I also want to really commend you Kara because I have found a lot of life coaches are really about weight loss. And I don't know very many that just are about accepting as is.

So I just really wanted to say thank you for that. Because I think life coaching can be so powerful, but sometimes I can't recommend people because it's about that, and I just really appreciate that.

Kara: Yeah. I had to do a lot of self-coaching about that as you can imagine. What is truly hilarious is that my teacher who I love and is one of my best friends is still a weight loss coach. And there are people who think that's unacceptable and I'm complicit and whatever, and I'm not - that's valid.

But that's just as a coach, I can't live in a place of like, intense judgment about other people's thought patterns and still be able to coach. That just wouldn't work. I can't be the purity police and be a good coach.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

But I had to do a lot of work on that. And hilariously, ironically, the thought work that she teaches that has changed my whole life I learned from her in the last weight loss thing I ever signed up for.

It was wild. So she was teaching - I will say at least to her credit and the people who are trained by that school, they at least understand that weight loss won't change your feelings about yourself.

And so they are always teaching the emotional part too. So she was teaching both. This thought work and then some food stuff. And I was like, but wait a minute, you're teaching how to use this thought work to lose weight but I could just use this thought work to love my body and then I don't have to bother with losing weight.

Victoria: Yes, because it's largely out of our hands.

Kara: This is the whole point. And then around the same time, I learned a lot about health at any size and diet culture and was able to put it together and be like, oh, and also here's the long-term statistics on the failure of weight loss and all of that.

And then when I went and got certified, I was still new in that world. So I had to coach myself a lot. But I will say, I think it's a balance. When you are trying to learn something, a new way of thinking, when you're trying to learn to love your body, yes, it makes sense to protect that fragile new thinking and not necessarily try to expose yourself to additional stuff, weight loss talk and whatever.

But I know for sure that one of the reasons I am so strong in this and have such a strong message on it and have been able to create this big reach in

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

the world is because going through that certification with everybody around me talking about weight loss and being friends with weight loss coaches, exposure basically.

Testing my ideas against that and coaching myself through those feelings of being triggered by it are why now I'm unflappable about it. So I do think it's a balance.

In the beginning, sometimes yes, you want to sort of protect yourself from that stuff. But the truth is you can't stop the world. Not right away. And I do think sometimes the way that we talk about any kind of oppressiveness around us, we encourage people to try to control ever seeing any of it, which you really - I don't think you end up feeling strong. I think you end up feeling afraid.

Victoria: Yeah. And I will also add to that. I think condemning people who do encourage weight loss only creates more of a separation. And I was once that person. I could never judge that because I used to do that back in my old career when I didn't know that health at every size and I wasn't an intuitive eating certified dietitian. So I think it's important for many reasons not to judge, including that we've all been there ourselves.

Kara: Totally. And of course, why do people think that? The same way any of us who came to this way of thinking probably originally had diet brain. So we can totally understand it.

Victoria: Absolutely. Okay, I've loved this conversation but I do want to shift gears because one of the big things I wanted to talk to you about is New Year's resolutions. We're in that new year new me mentality. It's rampant right now.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

And I just would love to hear from you, especially from you, what do you think about them? Are these good goals? Is this a good thing to do? Or is this just a way to morph your perfectionism into another fantasy land?

Kara: Totally. One of my old clients was reminiscing that I used to run this very high-end expensive program that I no longer do. But she was like, "The minute I knew it was going to be worth the money was you were coaching this other person and you said new Natasha isn't coming and we don't need her."

She was like, "And that blew my mind." Because I was coaching on exactly this. New me and I'm going to be this new person, and I was like, there's no new person coming and we don't need a new person.

So I think especially as a coach, you're sort of - on the one hand, a lot of my work is teaching women that they can accomplish more than they ever dreamed was possible for themselves. They can feel better about themselves than they ever dreamt was possible, they can accomplish - I had never displayed any business acumen whatsoever in my life.

And I had no experience, and I quit my law job, and I made seven figures as a coach in my first three years. It's not normal. It's much more than I ever believed I could. It's only because of these coaching tools.

So I am never against women setting goals or anybody setting goals. But I 100% do think that especially around the new year and any resolutions that have to do with weight or exercise or having the perfect morning routine - there's this weird fetishization of morning routines.

Victoria: There really is right now.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Kara: Why are people so obsessed with it? It's so weird.

Victoria: I think it just is that wellness world where it seems so idealistic but the truth is a lot of us are running around crazy. I mean, I think there is a balance between those two worlds. But it is a fetish right now.

Kara: I think waking up and doom scrolling the news first thing before you get out of bed is not a good morning routine, I agree. But I do think it's just gotten weirdly fetishized.

Anyway, whatever. So I think, as you say, I think of it as if you ever see two amoebas and one sucks the other one in, absorbs it, that is sometimes what happens with perfectionism and goals. You get a goal, it just gets sucked up by your perfectionism.

So the way I teach it, it's sort of two different things. On a conceptual, philosophical, thought work level, what I teach is you have to understand what your reason is for setting a goal or making a resolution. And your reason is never that you just want to get in shape, or you want to lose weight, or you want to whatever.

That's just the surface. What's really underneath that? And any time that your resolution or your goal, your reason is because I don't feel good about myself now and I think if I did this I would feel better about myself, or I would be more worthy, I would finally be good enough, other people would finally approve of me, I would finally look good enough, if it's anything like that, you're just doomed to failure because you're putting way too much pressure on it.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Because your confidence is created by your thoughts about yourself. So people expect to berate themselves through losing weight, and then when they hit the magic number feel amazing about themselves. That's not how your brain works.

That's like being like, I'm going to write my right hand for 30 days and on the 30th day I'll magically write with my left hand. You've trained your brain to criticize yourself, whether it's weight loss or running, exercising, going to yoga, having a morning routine, or whatever, if your thoughts about yourself are I'm bad and I need to fix this and better do it perfectly or I'm terrible, you're never going to get - you can't swim a polluted river to a clean ocean.

So I think any time that is the reasoning behind your goal, you're going to have trouble. And the truth is that setting and accomplishing a new goal requires a lot of discomfort.

So if you're trying to do it to feel good about yourself, you're going to give up real fast because it feels terrible usually to try things and fail and be bad at them and try again and all that persistence that's required to really accomplish something new does not feel good. So if you're just trying to feel good with your goal about yourself, you're never going to stick with it.

Victoria: I love that. So what can we do if we do want to set goals? What can we do to make sure we do stick to them?

Kara: Yeah, so if you really - here's how to know if you are setting a goal correctly if you're a perfectionist, which sounds like probably most of your listeners are. Most of mine too.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

By the perfectionists are not people who do everything perfectly. Everybody's confused about this. Not you, but some of your listeners might be confused. Perfectionists are people who think that they should do things perfectly.

So my clients are always like, "I'm not a perfectionist." I'm like, I beg to differ. Let me show you. So here's the perfect way to set a goal if you're a perfectionist. It should seem so small that your brain tells you it doesn't count. Like, that's it. Walking 10 minutes a day, or taking a 20-minute walk three times a week. Your brain that wants you to do 90 minutes of power yoga every day for the rest of your life thinks that that's not good enough, that's not enough, it's not worth it, that's the antidote to perfectionism.

We call it the minimum baseline. Like, the smallest thing that you can consistently do, your brain will always tell you, if you're a perfectionist, that's not big enough and it's not fancy enough and it's not going to change enough. That's how you know you actually have a good goal.

Victoria: That's perfect. I feel like that's so achievable too. That's what I love about that. And you're so right. Perfectionists, we tend to be people who are like, "I'm going to set a goal that I'm going to do 90 minutes of yoga a day and then I'm going to work these hours and I'm going to get this done..."

Kara: "I'm going to change my whole diet." Or what if your goal was like, "I'm going to eat one additional vegetable a day."

Victoria: Yes, that's perfect.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Kara: What I always say is, like, if it's so easy, go do it for a month and then you can add something new.

Victoria: Yes, that's how I've actually – so, I'm still in my post-partum – I mean, it's been a year and a half, but I still consider myself very much in the post-partum journey. And exercise was just so challenging because I had a completely new routine, I had a new baby, and I exercise because I feels good and it helps me relieve stress. But I was having the damn hardest time creating a routine out of it. And I was like, "You know what? You're going to start out with five minutes a day and 10 minutes a day and you're going to go to one exercise class."

Because I kept trying to go, like, four times a week and I just was like, "No, one. And then two." And now I'm at about three exercise classes a week and I'm like, "Of course, Victoria." Isn't it funny how the things I tell my clients are the things sometimes I forget to tell myself.

Kara: Always, yeah. Half the time when I coach I'm like, "Oh, that was for me."

Victoria: I know, I'm like, I never tell people to go from zero to 60. So funny how I need to remind myself of that.

Kara: Yeah, and like – I can't stress enough that, like, people just believe their brain when their brain is like, "That's not enough. It's too slow," you know. Like, that resistance is actually everything. That's how you actually do something achievable.

Victoria: Ooh, that's a good tip. I'm going to write that down. Okay, so helpful. Thank you so much. Another thing I wanted to ask you about, I'm

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

actually really curious about this this one. What are women empowerment sayings that are doing a disservice to us all? I can't wait to hear your response.

Kara: Yeah, I have a lot of feelings.

Victoria: I'm like, wait, which ones? I want to know.

Kara: So many. Well, I definitely think, "Just love your body." We've already kind of talked about why that one's not useful. I think, if I knew how to do that I would, thank you, right? Like, how? I think, "Fake it until you make it," is a really common women's empowerment strategy that's completely stupid.

It doesn't work. The truth is, if faking it until you make it worked, then nobody would have imposter syndrome after the age of 30 or something. We would all age out of it. We don't because your thoughts create your feelings, create your actions. You cannot fake your actions to work backwards and change your thinking.

It's like, imagine if we were like, "If you don't like kissing someone, just keep kissing them until you do." That's not how that works. You can't kiss someone to make yourself like them. That's not how it works. The action doesn't cause the thought and the feelings.

And I understand, like – it's still shocking to me, but a lot of the world doesn't know that your thoughts cause your feelings cause your actions. So, we're all just kind of grappling around for some kind of advice. But I think that sort of fake it until you make it is really so unhelpful and it doesn't

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

do anything to relieve the stress and suffering that people are experiencing, and it doesn't help them.

I have clients who are CEOs – I'm a CEO – but are CEOs of big corporations or running multinational conglomerates. I mean, you can fake-confidence your way to the top. But you're still going to not feel good about yourself when you get there. It's not going to create any true confidence. So, that is one of my least favorites.

Victoria: Got any others for us? That was so fascinating. I couldn't agree more. Let's keep going.

Kara: Keep going – well, they won't be as diet-culture related, but you have to tell people what your needs are so they can meet them. That, I think, is terrible advice. That advice should be, "Try to control everyone around you and what they do to feel okay." Which when you say it that way doesn't sound so empowering and so nice, right? Like, I think that humans already are predisposed to try to control everyone around us in ways we can't.

And actually, this totally does relate to diet culture because I do think that women – one of the reasons that women develop eating disorders, I think, is of course we get much more messaging about our bodies and our value and worth being about our size and our appearance and the patriarchal socialization, all of that, totally. Also, I think that people turn to the things they can control to deal with what they can't control and, as a woman in a patriarchal society, you are often told and often feel that a lot of things are outside of your control.

And so, you turn to kind of the things that are within your control. And all humans have trouble with this, but when you tell someone what your needs

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

are so that they will meet them, you're telling yourself that you can't feel emotionally secure or okay unless someone else behaves a certain way, and that is actually incredibly disempowering.

A lot of the suffering in human life, I think, comes from us mistakenly believing that the way to feel secure is to control things outside of us, like other people, like our body, like our weight, like what we eat. I'm counting that as outside of us because it's about actions or things that we can't totally control. And then, hoping that that will translate to the feeling of safety and security.

But that's never how it works. And when you see with people who are like – orthorexia is the perfect example. You don't start to feel better and better. You start to feel worse and worse.

I always think of, like, imagine somebody who is a total germaphobe. You can, like, lock yourself in your house. Okay, now I'm in my house, I should feel safe. But no, all you've done is teach your brain to be afraid of germs, so now you're just going to start freaking out about, like, "I don't know, there might be a tiny crack in that window and one could get through there."

That's how the human brain works. So, the more that you try to control, tell other people what to do and control them to feel okay, the less okay you're going to feel.

Victoria: So well-said. Okay, I have one for you I want to hear your thoughts on; know your worth.

Kara: Oh yeah, that's always my third. That's a classic. So, I think that comes up the most in kind of, well, both relationships and financial,

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

actually. It's not just financial. I think this is terrible advice because, in some ways, because it – especially when it's given in career situations, this is often given around finances, like when you're asking for a raise or if you're pricing for your clients, to like know and charge your worth.

But what it does is link up to things that aren't connected, which are your intrinsic worth you just have as a human, and what this other random person in question is willing to pay for your labor or skills. Those are two totally different things. And I think that one of the reasons, like, women are worse at negotiating for raises for many reasons, not because there's anything wrong with us. It's how we're socialized. How we're taught to think about money.

But also because advice like this that's supposed to sound empowering, if you tell yourself that whether or not you get a raise is a measure of whether you are worth or whether someone else sees your worth and then – you're already super emotionally agitated going into it. Whenever you put your worth as a human on any conversation, you are going to be incredibly anxious and stressed out about it.

And that's true whether it's a relationship conversation or a financial conversation. So, yes, I want women to know that they are worthy, of course. But you have to create your own belief in your own worthiness by changing your thought patterns. That's the only way that's going to happen, if you didn't grow up with an intact one, like a lot of us didn't.

And it's not going to come from controlling other people. And if you try to have conversations about what you want – it actually goes back to wants versus needs. Because a lot of things that we call needs are just things we want. And that's okay. It's okay to want a partner who acts a certain way. Or it's okay to want a job that pays a certain amount. Go in there and give it

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

your best shot. If the other person doesn't want that also, whether it's your boss or your partner, now you know that and you can think about whether you're going to stay or if you're going to change jobs or if you're going to break up or whatever.

But when you make your worth all mixed up in that, then you get stuck in this crazy cycle where if you decide that you have to know your worth in your relationship, and that means getting your partner to act a certain way to show that you're worthy, now you actually are going to be stuck with them, you're going to stay in that relationship constantly trying to change their behavior. Because now, you put your worth on the line and your worth needs to be proven, and so you actually get more sucked in to staying.

This happens with jobs also. So, this advice just has the opposite effect of what it's supposed to.

Victoria: Yeah, I think that is so incredibly true. And one of the things, when we are talking about self-worth on the podcast, one of my questions back to you is, well then what should our self-worth be dependent on, if anything at all?

Kara: I think nothing. I mean, I really am both very absolute and very pragmatic.

Victoria: I love that about you...

Kara: I mean, human worth is a made-up concept. It's all made up. It's all just human words. I don't think my cat has an idea about cat worth...

Victoria: Oh my god, I'm dying right now.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Kara: It's just made up. But here's the thing. I think it's made up, but I have never seen a good argument for why it might be different between people. I think it's made up, and we get to decide, do we want to believe everybody has inherent worth or nobody has inherent worth?

Well, I would just rather believe everybody has inherent worth. That seems like I get much better results from thinking that. And the problem is that all of us have decided that our worth is conditional on various things.

I often do this exercise when I'm coaching someone about this, which is so fascinating. Brains are so weird. When you start studying your brain, you just realize that it's completely bananas that you have been believing everything this thing says to you. Because it's so irrational.

So, I will sometimes do this thing with people where I'm coaching them on it where I ask them if a baby has inherent worth. And most people say, "Yes." And I'll be like, "Okay, a two-year-old, a three-year-old, they have inherent worth." And then we just keep going and everybody has a different point at which all of a sudden they're like, "Nope, now it's conditional."

It's so weird. It's anywhere from, like, 23 to I had once somebody say six month in utero because she had absorbed a twin in utero. And she had been subconsciously judging herself from that point on basically. Like, retrospectively. She wasn't doing it when she was six months in utero.

But like, it's wild. And for almost everybody, then then can connect it to something that happened in their life and then they start to see, that just happens to be the moment at which somebody first suggested to me that I might be unworthy. That's where that comes from.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Victoria: Absolutely. I wrote down, "Worthiness should not be conditional or dependent," and I couldn't agree more. When people ask me, "Okay well what should I make my self-worth based off," I'm like, nothing at all.

Kara: Right, you're not like, "Actually, it could be based on how much calcium..." Sometimes I like to pick really random things just to show how silly it is. Think about, in a different society they could have been like, "Well worthiness is based on how many goats you have."

Victoria: Your analogies are great. I'm cracking up over here. The cat one got me good. But it's so true. That's why it's so great. It's just like, yeah, my cat's not over here contemplating its worthiness, so why am I?

Kara: And think about how you feel about your cat, right? My cat does nothing to earn his keep. And in fact, he's actively annoying half the time.

Victoria: So true of both of my animals.

Kara: But I still love him unconditionally. I mean, actually, pets are a really powerful example, when somebody's struggling with unconditional love for themselves or for a partner or for someone else, thinking about yourself the way you think about your pets, you're not like, "Well, that cat could stand to lose a few pounds. I would love him if he was a size two." No.

Victoria: I can't stop laughing over here. I'm going to mute myself. And also, this is so true. I think if we can view it from that perspective, like, can we see how this also needs to be true for ourselves?

Kara: Right, we're all just animals. If our cat is worthy, is it okay if somebody just kills your cat for no reason?

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Victoria: Oh my god, no.

Kara: Because your cat has inherent worth to you. And the same is true for you.

Victoria: This is beautiful. I love this, Kara, so much. You are incredible. I know everyone listening feels the same way I do right now. I have a huge grin on my face. I just feel really – not empowered – it's just like I feel like this is such a nurturing conversation. So, we need to know everything about you. Where can we listen to you. Tell us about your podcast *Unf\*ck Your Brain*. And also, I want to know about your coaching community too.

Kara: Yes, here's my address. Everybody can come snuggle me. Not during a pandemic though. My podcast is called *Unf\*ck Your Brain*. You can find it anywhere you ever get a podcast, basically, or [unfuckyourbrain.com](http://unfuckyourbrain.com). And The Clutch is my feminist coaching community, which is my favorite thing in the entire world.

It's basically a membership program where you join and I teach you – and it's month by month – and I teach you, number one, how to coach yourself, like a basic process for understanding, exactly like we talked about today, how do you differentiate between your thoughts and objective reality, how do you figure out what you're thinking and feeling and how it's making you act? How do you change what you're thinking on purpose?

It's like all those basic life coaching kind of thought work tools that you need. But then, you also can dive deep into whatever topics are, like an area for you. We do a lot on body image, obviously. That's one of my big things. And it is a health at any size friendly community.

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

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

I don't ban talk of weight loss because that would be very antithetical to my whole thing of you manage your own mind, but I don't coach on it. And most people are drawn to me because of my health at any size non weight loss non diet talk, so there really is not much of that at all going on. It's really focused on body image neutrality than positivity, relating to your body differently.

And then, you know, money work, relationships, dating. I mean, there's a million areas, obviously.

Victoria: Yeah, it affects...

Kara: Every area of your life. That's the thing. I don't think it has as much of a stigma as therapy used to, with coaching. But people still sort of think, "Well, they should just be able to figure it out themselves." Or if you need help with it, there's something wrong with you."

We don't think there's something wrong with other people. We just think there's something wrong with us if we need help. And the truth is, nobody – being a human is nuts. You're just born. Nobody gives you a manual. Nobody explains how your brain works. Nobody explains how to change your life or how to get what you want in life or how to create it. You're just like set free and you're supposed to figure it out. And it's just impossible.

When I found this work I was like, "Oh my god, this is the secret to life. Why did no one ever not teach me this before?" So, that's why we have The Clutch, so that you can skip that part and just learn it.

Victoria: And I couldn't agree more. I think we all deserve to invest in ourselves and have that, like you said – it's not that... our world is just not

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

set up for success for us, so why not create that for ourselves by investing and getting these tools for coaching ourselves?

So I love that. I'll make sure to link all of that in the show notes because you are absolutely incredible, Kara. I do want to leave – I mean, I'm very into this conversation, but I do want to leave off asking a question I ask every guest that comes on the show.

Our philosophy here is wellness without obsession. And I would love to hear, in this exact season of your life, how do you personally practice wellness without obsession?

Kara: Yeah, I have been working a lot of doing less and creating more space in my life. So, it's not food related. It's not movement related. It really is, like, I have been – you know, you start a business, there's a hustle period, which I think is kind of necessary. I don't think you can get something big off the ground without some hustle in the beginning, and that's okay. But there's a transition that needs to happen and I think I have been really working on creating spaciousness in my calendar, in my emotional life, like calming down, slowing down, really being in the present.

Wellness, the way we pursue it, it's like we're trying to work our way hard towards health or something, some place so we can enjoy our life, but we never get there because we're always trying to work to it. And so, to me, true wellness is really just being present in your present moment and not believing that you need anything else to be okay where you are. And so, that is what I am practicing, as always.

Victoria: That was beautifully said. Kara, thank you so much for sharing and thank you so, so much for being here today.

## **UFYB 218: New Year's Resolutions are Perfectionist Fantasies: A Conversation with Victoria Myers of the Nourishing Women Podcast**

Kara: Thank you, this was great.

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