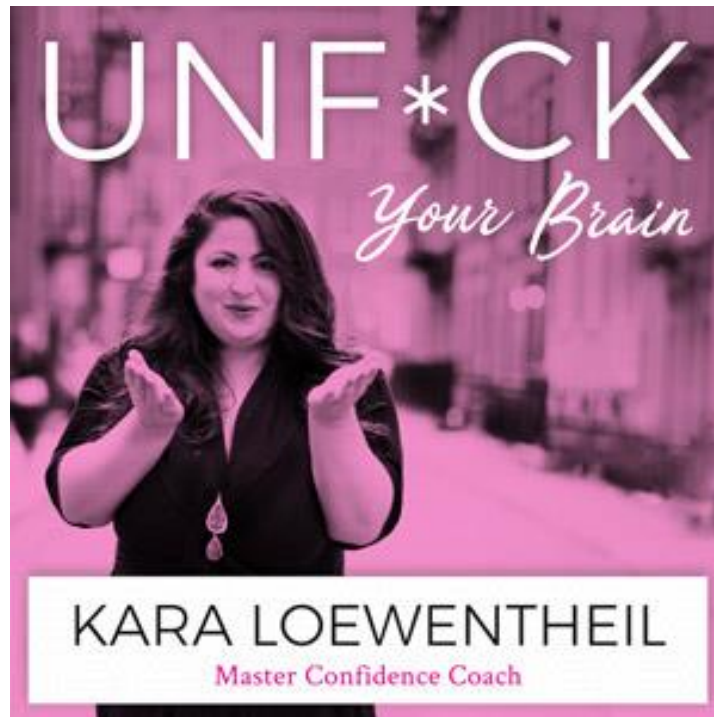


UFYB 232: Changing Biased Preferences in Dating or Anywhere Else: An Interview with Damona Hoffman



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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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. I am so excited to have this conversation today. I often have people who come on my podcast who I know already. And it's actually quite rare that we get a pitch and we let the person come on because as you all know, I'm very picky about who I let talk to my people. They've got to be friendly to thought work. Anyway, so I got this pitch and I was like, "Yes, I want to talk about this so much. This person seems amazing." So, I'm super excited about this.

And then I find out she's a celebrity dating coach apparently, so even better. And by the way, I always say this when I do a dating episode. Even if you're not dating you should listen to this. Everything is relevant to you. It is all a human brain. Your brain does not have some kind of dating segment that just turns on. Whatever we're talking about it's going to be relevant to you whether you date or don't date. And especially because we're going to be talking about racial bias in dating.

And as you know, we talk on this podcast all the time about internalized bias, how it affects your thought processes, how to become someone who can be self-reflective about that, and work on that, whatever identities you live in. We all have blind spots because none of us live in – nobody has every marginalized identity. Some of them are even incompatible with each other. So, we all can use this work whether or not we're dating, whether we're partnered, whether we're listening from a nunnery and we don't plan to be partnered, anybody.

Alright, so Damona has been coaching singles on how to find love online, offline for over 15 years. She's frequently featured in the LA Times, the

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Washington Post as an author. She is also an on-air contributor to The Drew Barrymore Show, NPR and NBC's Access Daily. She starred in not one but two A+E Networks TV shows, #BlackLove and A Question of Love. And she also has a podcast which is always fun. Because if you love this interview you want to listen to more.

Her podcast is called Dates & Mates which is also a great podcast title. And has been featured in Cosmopolitan, Huffington Post, Bustle and tops the charts in the relationship categories. So welcome. Is there anything else you think my people should know about you before we get started?

Damona: I am not just the club president, I'm also a member. So, I actually, you know, I talk a lot about online dating much to Drew Barrymore's dismay.

Kara: Wait. Why is that to her dismay?

Damona: She's been very vocal about hating dating apps because she has a bad experience on, I'll just go ahead and say, it was on Raya. And she met somebody who ghosted her which it happens to everyone. If it happens to Drew Barrymore it can happen to anyone.

Kara: It happened before dating apps too. I mean you read any Victorian novel, there's some soldiers ghosting some ladies.

Damona: Thank you for saying that, Kara. Obviously. I just look at dating apps as an amplifier. They're an amplifier of what is already happening in society. And I know we're going to talk a lot about that. But I do this work because I have lived it. And I actually met my husband online. Our 15th wedding anniversary is actually next week.

Kara: Masel tov.

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Damona: Thank you. Thank you. So, I have been through this experience that probably some of your listeners are going through right now. And I've come out the other side and that's what makes me so passionate about sharing what I know about dating apps. And how when you use the tool correctly it actually, it can unf*ck your brain. It can reprogram you. And it really can be the greatest tool for discovery about yourself and the relationship you want.

Kara: Amen and co-sign, I met my husband on online, through online dating too, I've had most of my serious relationships actually because I've always worked in basically all women feminist organizations. And I'm straight and date men. And I hate talking to strangers. So that's pretty much the only way, it would have to be UPS man otherwise. There's no other way.

Damona: I actually say that on Dates & Mates. I'm like, "Unless your future husband is the UPS man, he isn't going to come up and just knock on your door." So, you know this.

Kara: Oh my God, we've been saying the same things.

Damona: Well, that's what, hey, and I don't pitch just any show. So that's why I pitched you because I know we are saying a lot of the same things. We come at it from different perspectives but I love the work that you do on the show. So, thank you for having me.

Kara: I always say that about manifesting, it's like you're trying to manifest your future partner. If you don't get some action line happening, it's going to have to be like unless it's the UPS guy, nobody's just going to show up in your apartment. You'd better go out and take some action, not just sit around being like, "Someday." Oh my God, if we could just riff. But I do have questions that I want to ask you.

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Damona: Hopefully I have answers too.

Kara: We'll come back on the next time and do it all again.

Damona: With more questions.

Kara: Yeah, let's start with this. But okay, because we do want to make sure that we kind of hit the main topic and I'm sure we'll have a lot of interesting digressions. So, I think people explain these things different ways. And my listeners are very kind of familiar with my explanation. But how would you define or explain racial bias? I mean it's hard to imagine somebody hasn't heard that term or doesn't know what it means, especially who listens to this podcast. But I still think your definition would be helpful.

Damona: My definition is basically just having judgment about someone just based on the color of their skin. And we could get into a whole conversation about how race is a construct. Anyway.

Kara: Of course, right. Well, that's why it's the perfect thought work, mind fuck. Because it's all made up but because we all believe in it, it has major impacts just like all the other social constructs that we made up. But now we act on and believe on and they produce real results in the world.

Damona: Yes. And that's why I think it's important to talk about it because it does have a real impact. And from my vantage point I come from a very diverse background. So, my mom is Black and she grew up in the Projects in Detroit. My dad is Jewish, son of European immigrants to the US. He grew up in a suburb of Chicago where he was one of very few Jewish people. And somehow they met and produced me.

Kara: I think it's a good story there.

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Damona: There actually is a good story. I'm writing it in my book.

Kara: Okay, we'll save it for the book.

Damona: So, you can hear the story in 2024.

Kara: Everybody buy the book if you want.

Damona: It's not going to be out for a while. But maybe you'll get it out of me. But yes, there is a story, there's always a story. But that's the foundation for the prism that I look at the world through. And my sister-in-law is Indian American, her parents had an arranged marriage. So, I have that experience. My parents, they didn't last. So, my dad is now remarried to a Mexican American woman.

So, my entire family experience I feel like my life has been enriched and enhanced by having relationships and caring about people who have completely different cultural experiences from myself. And so that is really what I aim to show people that they can do through dating. And I just have found that coming from – I used to work in corporate media. I used to be a diversity executive. And representation matters. And I talked a lot about representation in terms of television and media.

But representation matters in your own life. If you don't have those experiences with people who are different from you it's really hard for you to form a realistic impression of who they are or what their culture stands for.

Kara: Yeah, I think that's so important. And I want to talk about specifically how you see racial bias showing up in this way. But I mean I think one of the things that's amazing about online dating is that depending on how you use it, you actually get exposed to a much broader range of people than

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you will probably come into contact with potentially in your daily life. I mean the studies show that most people have – and obviously this depends partly on where you live and what your cultural, and political, and all these things backgrounds are.

But a lot of people live lives where most of their close contacts are people who look just like them, or who are from within their own community.

Damona: Completely. And that is sort of the blessing and the curse, I guess, of dating apps. I love dating apps because it expands your social circle. And I have been coaching really since dating apps were in their infancy. And I always saw the opportunity here, that dating apps expand, like you said, your social circle, your pool. And I'm also a feminist like you.

I don't really want to go back to the old way of, you know, you look at census data and most people met and married someone who lived within just a few blocks of their house, a few blocks. Just in the last 100 years. So, if your rabbi didn't know them and your mom didn't know them, you didn't go to school with them, you probably weren't going to meet them. And there were a lot of relationships that were born out of that, just lack of opportunity, lack of exposure to someone who was different.

And now through technology, through even transportation, through the ability, I have a lot of clients who have met and formed relationships with and married someone who lived in another state or another country. That wasn't possible. That was not possible even 30 years ago, that was a whole different conversation. Now because of the tech tools that we have, not just dating apps but the way that we communicate, even cross cultural, if you didn't speak another language, well, too bad. Now you can just ask Siri how to translate. And now she's sitting right next to me, she's going to speak.

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Kara: I'm waiting for the romantic comedy that basically hinges on Siri misinterpreting something and then one person storming out. Then they have to find each other five years later on the train because their phones recognize each other. I feel like we could do a screenplay treatment right now.

Damona: Oh my gosh. Well, you're talking to a content person.

Kara: So, there you go.

Damona: I see that.

Kara: So, can you talk a little bit, obviously this is the positive side to dating apps. And we also know that all the same hierarchies that play out in the real world play out on dating apps. There's racial bias on dating apps, there's fat bias on dating apps. How do you see racial bias specifically? I don't know. Well, I want to talk about both but you tell me what order makes more sense, apps and then just generally in the context of dating and relationships.

Damona: Well, let me back up for a second into how I ended up in this conversation anyway aside from everything I've already told you. But back in 2020, let's say June of 2020 I had a friend whose a matchmaker who posed a question in this group of other friends and colleagues of mine, matchmakers, and dating coaches. She said, "I have a client who only wants to date a particular race. Is that racial bias?" And you asked me at the beginning, what is my definition.

So, by my definition, I think she may have even said, "Is it racist?" Which I'm very careful, that's a third rail for me. But the term, racist. But is it racist if you will only date someone of a particular race, or you won't date someone of a particular race? And to me the answer was, duh. I mean isn't

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that the definition as given, the definition I gave at the top of the show. Isn't that the definition of racial bias? And I was really shocked to see that a lot of my friends and colleagues didn't agree.

They were like, "Well, that's just your preference. That's your dating preference." Some people want to date someone who's tall. Some people want to date someone who's rich. Some people prefer someone who's thin. If they just prefer to date their own race then that's just a preference. And I was like, "I don't like that."

Kara: I mean people use thin as the example and that's also fat phobia. I just prefer thin people is fat bias as well. There's so many of these so supposed just 'personal preferences' that are socially constructed value systems.

Damona: Yes. And this is why you and I are simpatico because I see the opportunity, let's get in there and learn something. And so, I wrote a piece about it. I write for the Washington Post Date Lab. My editor of Date Lab was like, "Would you write a piece for us about that?" And I was like, "Okay, I guess." And just what I was aiming to do was to just unpack that decision process of you want to say this is just your dating preference. But what is underneath that? It is a bias whether we're going to call it a racist choice or just call it racial bias.

It is a bias that is at play. And I'm not saying it's anyone's fault. I'm just asking people to examine it. Where does that come from? Does it come from redlining because you didn't have anyone Black in your neighborhood because they couldn't get a house in your neighborhood? And therefore, your social circle when we were dating based on the old rules, in the old technology, or the lack thereof, you only had access to those people. Or are you more attracted to someone who has certain features because that's the standard of beauty that the media continues to portray?

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And so, you're told that's what's beautiful. And therefore, you start to continue to look for that when you are on your dating journey. And so, I do this technique with my clients. It's actually a business technique. You probably know the five whys. So, the five whys, you basically just start with why. So, if someone says, "Well, I only want to date someone who is my same race." And I say, "Why?" And from that answer we follow up with another why, and another why until we get to the root cause.

And it was shocking to me, Kara because – well, I will say, I wasn't surprised. But I got a huge response from this Washington Post article. And someone tried to hack my website. I got hate mail. I got negative comments. I got called a racist myself. I got called sexist which is very interesting. I don't know how they got to that.

Kara: They were just brainstorming, they were like, what other isms can I pull out here?

Damona: And I never called anyone racist. I just said, "If you lead with a dating preference, I'm asking you to unpack that. I'm asking you to ask the five whys and really see what's underneath that. And you might at the end of the road realize that there was a bias there that you didn't realize existed." And as we are being asked in our professional lives, in our neighborhoods to examine these beliefs in other areas, I don't feel we should just give ourselves a pass in dating.

Kara: 100%, I just want to say amen again. I think one of the things that you're articulating that I want to reemphasize for everybody listening is we're talking about there's different levels of bias. So, there are certainly people who have just explicit racial bias. And we also know, we're both Jewish, we know plenty of Jewish people who only want to date other Jewish people. So actually, there's three things.

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So one is, there's the first level of bias which I would call somebody just being like, "I don't want to date this group, this racial group, this body size, whatever, because I have an explicit bias against it and I feel great about that. I don't want to." Then there's the level at which you have been – and I think that is getting less common although maybe more common that we still think.

And then there is this level of more, I think, subtle internalized bias where you take to be just your personal preference, what are actually socially constructed belief systems about who's attractive, who's safe, who's a good match, all the different ways. I mean we haven't even gotten into this part but the ways in which we are socialized to think that the person we're dating is a reflection of our social status. And then with the messages that we get around who is socially worthy, who is a good catch, who's going to be a good whatever kind of partner that we're looking for.

All of that stuff is impacted by racial bias and all these other forms of bias. We don't reflect on it as you're saying, then we just think it's a personal preference. And so much social construction goes under the guise of that, of that in dating and everywhere else of just thinking it's a personal preference. So, what I want to underline for all of you is I never will just take, that's just what I prefer. It is okay to have preferences but just question them. Why do you prefer it? Is there an emotion you're trying to get away from? Is there a bias under there? What is that preference?

Here's something I want to ask you because I think this is one of the nuanced interesting places. Do you feel differently or have different advice, or different coaching when – I think the form of bias that we all probably feel pretty comfortable with saying, you should interrogate this is when a person of an advantaged or group has kind of a bias against a person from a disadvantaged group or a minority group. But what do you think about Jewish people only want to date Jews?

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Or if a person of color is like, “I don’t want to date white people, they don’t understand my experience and I only prefer to date people of color.” I think it’s more nuanced when we’re talking about numbers, or a marginalized group, or an in group it may be a different situation, or maybe not. I’m just curious what your thoughts are about that.

Damona: My thoughts are that dating is, it’s my tool for helping people discover themselves and discover their true beliefs. So, while it’s certainly different. And look, I hosted a show called #BlackLove and I worked with Black women who some of whom were like, “I’m looking for Black love.” Which it’s funny, it means a thing. Black love means a thing. But when the show was being developed I don’t think that there was an understanding from people who were not Black that Black love means love between two Black people.

Kara: Right. Not just the person on the show is Black and then whoever they fall in love with.

Damona: Right. I almost didn’t do the show because my husband is white, my dad is white. I believe in race open dating and connecting with the person. So, I was like, “I’m not sure I’m the host that you want for the show.” Because I’m never going to say, “Black love, you must find someone who’s Black.” And believe me, I understand all the nuances of that, of the comfort of being with someone that you don’t have to explain yourself to, explain your culture to. And I know it’s not for everyone.

And in the article that I wrote for the Washington Post I talked about a client I had who is Indian. And she was saying that she’s dated people outside of her race. And it really impacted her relationship with her father. And through the five whys technique we got to the core which was her relationship with her family was more important than anything to her. That was the highest level of importance for her in finding a partner. So, it really

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damaged her relationship with her family when she dated someone who was not Indian.

And therefore, her quest, her program with me was hyper focused on finding someone who was of her same background because through this work we identified what was underneath all of that and what were her core values. And so, you might say, “I’m Black and it’s most important to me to be with someone of my culture.” And continue to promote Black beauty and all of these things that we talk about in the Black community.

But you might say, “Hey, while I’m dating I’m just going to also see what else is out there and try to see somebody for who they are in the inside and all of the other things that they bring to the table.” Look, it can be exhausting. And since 2020 I’ve had to explain a lot of things to some friends. I’ve had to be a proxy for a lot of people. I’ve had to go through some discomfort in helping people process Black Lives Matter and all of that. So, I’m not signing anybody else up for this journey. You always have the choice but I’m just letting people know that it is an option.

Kara: I mean I think one of the things that – obviously correct me if I’m wrong. But one of the things I think I’m hearing you say or at least the way I would filter through some of the way I talk about things is, one of the things I’m always talking about is know what your reasons are. And make sure that you like them so that it’s not just unexamined. And so, there’s a big difference between, I just don’t want to date this kind of person. Because I just am not attracted to them. It’s a whole group of people that I’ve just decided I’m not attracted to.

And that’s just a random personal preference, I’ve never interrogated. Is a very different choice than I’m a member of this particular marginalized community. I have obviously given some thought as to who I’m willing to date and what kind of understanding I need. And I’m making that choice

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with intention from my values or my beliefs about what's the kind of relationship I want. Not all kind of decisions about who you might include or exclude are the same.

In the way I would say, it's not the action line of the model necessarily of am I going to go on a date with this person that's the issue. It's what's the thinking behind it, is it reflective? Is it intentional? Have you done that unpacking work? I love that example about your Indian client also because I do think that the cult of individual, and I'm a pretty individualistic person. I talk a lot obviously about individual autonomy. But for me that's the autonomy to choose any value system as long as you do feel free to choose it.

And I think there are a lot of people who would hear that story and their response would be, "Well, obviously the right outcome is that the person feels freed from their family constraints to find their one true love who may or may not be like this particular group." But in fact, that might be your true values and intention is there's a lot of people in the world I could be happy with. And this relationship with my family is important or carrying on marrying another Jew is important to me for reasons that I feel good about.

And there isn't just like I'm not going to miss my one soulmate because I have decided to create intentional, just limits on decisions about who I'm dating. So, I think there's bias in the other direction where I think there are people who hear that story and then think, well, we should liberate that person from their concern about what their family thinks so they can date whoever they want. And that's not always the right outcome either.

It's what's that person's values and what kind of choices are they going to make in the context of those values.

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Damona: Yeah. And I don't want to speak lightly about that choice. And my first writing job was for J dates, so I understand very well. I got so many Jewish mothers who were like, "Please help my son." So, I understand also that pressure as well that comes with family. Not everyone wants to be liberated. And the pain that that liberation...

Kara: She's doing air quotes which are important to see, even in using the term liberation, we're using it.

Damona: Right. And I'm with you. I'm 100% with you and that's my values and my perspective. But I do recognize that that process of being liberated can be really painful. My mom being the first Black woman that my dad introduced to his parents, that's kind of terrifying and vice versa. I think probably it was harder for my dad going the other way.

Kara: Right, everybody was probably terrified.

Damona: "Who is this white man?" And then some people, and I would hear, I grew up in a mostly white neighborhood. And most of my friends were white and they would say, "Well, I would date a Black guy but I wouldn't want to do that to my kids." I actually heard this more than once. And I'm like, "Do what? What are you doing?" And they're like, "It's just so hard for them because they don't fit in anywhere." And I'm like, "That's one way of looking at it." I look at it as I have the ability to connect with so many people everywhere because of my multicultural background.

And depending on where you are, I grew up in Michigan, and the way that my world feels in Michigan versus the way my world feels in Los Angeles where I live now, very different. A very different experience to walk through depending on where you are and the people that you surround yourself with. So, I don't say any of this lightly. This is work you may be signing yourself up for. But look, we're here to grow. We're here to learn. And if we

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don't take this opportunity, that many of our ancestors did not have then what are we even doing? What are we doing?

Kara: Hallelujah. Amen again. What do you think, so let's say somebody is listening and they're like, "I recognize myself." I think that I have written off a group of people, whether it's a racial group or even any other group. Yes, I have been taking as personal preference a socially constructed bias of some kind. How do you suggest that they go about kind of starting to try to work on that or be a little bit more intentional? I mean for listeners of this podcast obviously you can work on your thoughts.

But do you recommend, is it sort of like, okay, let me go on some dates with people I wouldn't normally consider and see, is it, are there changes people shouldn't use, these apps, the algorithm also learns from what you're swiping on? So, do you just shut it down and start all over so you have a fresh slate? What do you recommend people do?

Damona: It's such a great question. And I talk a lot about mindset, the foundation of my program is mindset. And all the things you were just saying about clarifying your goals and your values and all of that. So that's the foundation. But once that happens I feel you learn through action. You've got to get into action. And so, I am a huge fan of dating apps being that tool that expands your pool, as you were saying earlier. And through those experiences I think you will start to feel your mind expanding, your experiences expanding.

And the algorithm doesn't take long to be reprogrammed. And full disclosure, I actually work with OkCupid now. So, I can tell you a lot from what's happening on the backend.

Kara: Yeah. So many questions about that but okay.

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Damona: Well, yeah, and I have data, I have all the good stuff.

Kara: Oh my she's making a...

Damona: The data is like...

Kara: It's the precious, we're doing a little like the ring, the precious thing, amazing.

Damona: But the algorithm learns very quickly. And once you start making different choices it will populate fast. And actually, I got a lot of negative feedback from the article I wrote. But I got a lot of positive feedback. And I even had a friend of mine who is a dating coach who I really respect and trust. He said, he called me and he was like, "Damona, that article made me change the way that I use dating apps and the way that I search. And you completely shifted my perspective."

And he was like, "I have two dates with Black women set up this week. And I probably wouldn't have even thought about it if you hadn't written that article." So that is what keeps me in this, is just to take an action. You don't have to be like, "Okay, now I'm going to run away from my family and fall in love with an Indian man and move across the globe." You don't have to do all that. But you just have to say to begin this process, "What if? What if this thing that I thought was true my entire life, what if I always thought I was attracted to whatever, Jewish men."

Actually, fun fact. I told my dad, "I'm never going to marry a Jewish man, it's not going to happen so you can just get over it." I, quote, said that. And then I ended up meeting my husband who happens to be Jewish. And now we've been married for 15 years.

Kara: Rude.

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Damona: I know, right. So, I say these things because I've lived it. I've lived it. And sometimes the beliefs that you have in your head like, I didn't like going to Hebrew school on Sundays. I didn't like a lot of these things that maybe if I was going to unpack it, maybe my dad growing up in a place where there weren't many Jews. And then moving to another place where there weren't many Jews. Maybe there was some shame or self-loathing, or something that got passed down to me. I don't know.

I mean now I've really embraced it but I, in my head had this line drawn. And I never search based on Jewish, not Jewish. And this guy came up who I happened to really connect with and happened to also be Jewish. So, with dating apps it's interesting because we're in a period of change because of really Tinder was the first to disrupt because instead of at the beginning when you went down and checked every box, must be this, must be that. And that was all that was shown to you. People would limit their pool substantially.

And all the time I would see when I was coaching white clients, they would just check the box, white. Not because that necessarily was what they believed. But that was just the default. And so, they never were even seeing, there's tons of data on Black women send the most messages but get the fewest responses. That's all old data. Because now that we've moved into more of a swipe or on OkCupid we have stacks where it shows you the picture and you go based on the attraction initially.

It actually has shifted. And if you look at census data, we are now intra-marrying at higher rates than ever before. And I see the timeline interestingly correlated with the rise in the popularity of dating apps.

Kara: That's so interesting because Tinder gets such a bad rap. But actually, it's equalizing in some way. As somebody who works with dating

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apps. I guess what I mean is one of the stereotypes I feel in the online dating world is that Tinder is kind of the...

Damona: The hook-up app.

Kara: Yeah, the shallower version, that sort of people are. But it is interesting to think that as you say, in some ways, the less control you have over what you see the more you may be exposed to things outside your comfort zone or outside what you thought you were looking for.

Damona: Right, exactly. And I can look at it from both perspectives. Yes, it does make finding love a little more transactional when you are making decisions at such a rapid rate. So, remember I said, dating apps are just the amplifier of what is already happening. And so, the speed of dating has increased dramatically since Tinder increased the speed of being able to make a connection. Before, I don't know if you remember these olden times, but Eharmony, you would have to spend 10 hours writing up. No, it wasn't 10. But it was at least an hour.

On Match you would have to fill out all of these fields in a profile. It was a high barrier for entry and you had to pay for it. And then Tinder was, hey, it's free. You can just sign up, link it up with your Facebook, pull a couple of pictures from your Facebook. And you're online in 15 minutes or less. You could get the pizza, your pizza deliveryman, future husband at your doorstep slower than Tinder was. And so, I actually love that it really just disrupted it.

And we are now seeing a lot of the apps are moving in that direction for ease of use and for free to join. And it's become easier to make these connections, which I love. I love Tinder for that. But also, each dating app has a different pool, it has different functionalities. So, I say, find the app

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that delivers you the pool of people that you want to meet and that you don't dread using.

Kara: And that's also where your mindset stuff comes in. Part of I think is that people, at least what I have always taught is just some people's expectations about how it should work are just drastically out of proportion to what the reality is. When I coach people who are like, "I don't know, I just can't meet anyone. I have been on five first dates this year and I haven't met anyone." And I'm like, "If you said week, I would start to get concerned, if you're going on five dates a week and you hadn't met anyone. But five first dates a year is not the amount of dates you have to go on to meet a partner necessarily."

Damona: And let's think about, let's say 20 years ago if you had five first dates in a year actually were doing pretty good. That volume, I don't know about you but I was not meeting that many people going on that many dates. When the barrier for entry was, I've got to get my heels on, I've got to brush my hair.

Kara: Well, also we're dating much older, so much has changed over the last 20, 30 years with the advent of online dating.

Damona: It was just so much effort that you would have to put in to get five dates. And now we've kind of lost touch of just how much more opportunity is at our fingertips.

Kara: Yeah. And those things go together. It's more rejection and more opportunity for rejection. Just like if you build your business to a bigger scale, more people saying no and not liking you, and more people saying yes, and getting the transformation you offer. In any level, increased opportunity comes with increased risk of rejection or failure, and increased opportunity for success. Those things always are going to go together.

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Damona: And that's where the mindset work that you do and that I begin my programs with is really important because you need to have that part fortified before you set yourself up for all of those peaks and valleys.

Kara: Yeah, 100%. And this is something that I teach in more detail inside The Clutch and the module on sex and relationships. But I think one big piece is people need to understand is even your sexual attraction is socially constructed and conditioned to some extent. Yes, of course, there's pheromones and there's various whatever studies about people's compatible immune systems. And then there's your whatever, your childhood traumas you're working out. There's a lot of different aspects to what gets us going.

But some of it is what we're socially conditioned to find attractive. And so, neither of us are saying be virtuous and go on dates with people that you have no sexual attraction to, to prove that you're an openminded person. Number one, you hopefully want to do this work because you actually want to get to know yourself better, try to rewire some of the biased things that you've absorbed. And open yourself up to different kinds of opportunity and connection. I think sometimes people hear this and they're like, "Okay, so I'll just go on dates with people I'm not attracted to."

You can change who you're attracted to based on how you think about them. And I think that there's such obvious evidence, I mean if you look at, for instance, the studies showing that in America, Asian men are seen as sort of not as sexually viable, not as masculine. There's all these stereotypes. Obviously there are many countries full of Asian people where that is not the case. That's not how people see Asian men there. So, it's socially constructed. It's not just inherent, and that attraction is a social construction.

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So, these kinds of belief systems that people absorb, they literally, it's like brain and genitalia connected, attraction and arousal are not just some thing that happens in your body that your brain is not connected to. So, if you rewire some of this stuff. I mean that's really the best picture, this is have more opportunities for hot sex with way more different people. All of that, if you change your mindset, that's the result.

Damona: Yeah, that sounds interesting. I can't do it.

Kara: Yeah, all my monogamous listeners are like, "No, that's not a good sales pitch for me." But if you're single.

Damona: Right. But when we look at it in terms of extrapolating that out into other areas of your life, not having sex but just having connections with people who are different and just exploring. And how many times have I heard from clients, "I swiped right, I matched with this person. I wasn't really sure but when I met them in person, oh my gosh, they were so sexy. They were so interesting. They were so different than I thought that they were going to be." And sometimes you will find that person, confirms the bias that you have or isn't what you thought they were.

It's a less positive experience but leave yourself open to being surprised. You might discover that there's something different on the other side of that socially constructed belief that you are holding.

Kara: Yeah. I mean I was an avowed childless Manhattanite. And I now live in Brooklyn a block away from my divorced partner who has two children.

Damona: I heard. I heard.

Kara: That was not on my agenda either. And that wasn't a racial bias thing. But it was the sort of like, I don't want that.

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Damona: A borough bias.

Kara: I'm not into that. Yeah, I was child bias, and yet here we are.

Damona: Well, yeah, and actually geographic bias is a thing.

Kara: Totally. Oh my God, the number of Manhattanites who would never date somebody who lives in Jersey, or Staten Island. I mean Manhattan bias would literally be within one mile of me or don't message me.

Damona: Yes, all the time, I'm getting people that say, "Do you realize that five miles is not that..."

Kara: In New York, you're like, "You're across the river. We'll never meet. We would need a rowboat in the middle of the night. It's impossible."

Damona: And think of what you may be giving up by saying no to that. And sometimes that's it. That's just expanding some of these parameters. And this is what I have people do in my program. Just use the dating app as a tool and use your life as an experiential learning opportunity. What happens if I just go from five miles to 15? Or what happens if I don't check a box? And for the love of God, if you are on OkCupid, please tread lightly on the dealbreakers. People will be putting dealbreakers up.

Kara: Oh my God, there's profiles where you're like, so you sound fun, here's a list of 20 things you don't want me to be like. Is this what our first date will be like? I mean we could have a whole podcast about that.

Damona: Well, I have actually the data from OkCupid that says that the profiles that say that get far fewer responses than people that don't.

Kara: Of course, that person sounds like a bummer.

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Damona: Even we've added the features where you can check something as a dealbreaker. And that means that you will not see anyone who is not Jewish.

Kara: Right. I wouldn't have seen my partner, yeah, if I'd put has kids as a dealbreaker.

Damona: Right, exactly. And so, you really need to ask yourself, is this really a dealbreaker? Whether it's a dealbreaker on paper, or a dealbreaker in the app, or a dealbreaker just in your mind as you're searching. I just keep coming back to this, what if. What if what I believed about this person based on my prior experiences or my family history, what if that belief about that person is not true? And what if I could let them just show up as themselves and see what unfolds from there.

Kara: Yeah, I love that. And I think that all of this inquiry, what it leads you to is the really important work of what's the point of a relationship anyway? Is it to check a bunch of boxes so that your mom is happy? Is it to get the kind of person you think you're supposed to be with so that who knows what happens. All of this work ideally will drive you to be more focused on what are your values and intentions for a relationship and who can match that, the internal point. And much less focused on the which of the external boxes do these people check, yeah.

Damona: I'm curious to hear your answer to that question.

Kara: What's the point of a relationship?

Damona: Yeah.

Kara: I mean I think that everybody's differs depending on what their personal values are. For me one of my core values is growth and knowing

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myself on a deeper and deeper level. And relationships bring up all my fucking shit. And so that's actually a reason in some ways to go with something that wasn't what you thought you wanted. I had to do so much intense and fascinating work to be with somebody who had children. I had this fantasy that my partner was going to be also location, independent, child free, jet setting.

I had a very flexible life and then I found love with somebody who's got a nine to five government job and two small children. And basically, has to live in a 20 block area for the next 15 years. And that was very different. But the work I had to do, it made me clarify what are my values in a relationship? What kind of connection am I looking for? What's really important and what's not? Do I want to shift my identity in this way? I mean none of that work would have happened if I just found someone who fit the kind of idea I had of what I wanted which was so focused on, and then I feel happy all the time.

I mean we all do with anything we don't have yet, we just pretend that when we get there it's going to be a fantasy where we're always happy. So, for me it's somebody is there for me to practice loving them better and better and then to get to know myself to love myself better and better. I mean that's the point of a relationship for me. But I also don't think that's absolute. Some people might have very strong family values. That's not my thing but some people might be like, "The most important thing to me is having a Jewish family. That's what I want. So, I want to find someone where that's their major priority too."

But then maybe they are a race that I wasn't expecting. Or maybe they don't look the way I was expecting or whatever. It forces you to clarify what's important to you.

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Damona: Yeah. and even within cultures there's so much nuance that I think we forget. I mean even white is a construct, saying I'm white. That is 30 different cultural identities that we sometimes forget to recognize and the way that you celebrate Christmas, or thanksgiving, or whatever, may be totally different than another person who on the surface looks very similar to you.

So, I think with every relationship you have to remember, there's always this cultural learning curve of getting to know what someone is bringing to the table and how it may differ from what you have come to understand is truth.

Kara: So good. So where can people find you, your podcast, Dates & Mates? So, have you got a website we should go to, or where should they come find you?

Damona: Yeah. They can listen to Dates & Mates, wherever they're listening right now. Or at datesandmates.com. And I am on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook @damonahoffman. And occasionally you can also see me popping up on The Drew Barrymore Show.

Kara: Yeah, you guys can see her on TV. And we will look for your book, when is your book coming out?

Damona: January of 2024.

Kara: Me too. That's great.

Damona: Oh my gosh, we could do a co-book tour.

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Kara: We should have some kind of like, have you written your book yet? Have you written your book yet? Check in. Yeah, mine's winter, spring 2024.

Damona: I am still working on it. But we've touched on a lot of the things that I'll be talking about in the book. And I was actually just writing about the purpose of relationships so I was curious to know what you thought.

Kara: There you go.

Damona: But yeah, it's a labor of love, no pun totally intended.

Kara: I just saw this Julia Fox interview where she was asked about her book and she said, she goes, "Well, it's a masterpiece if I do say so myself." And then the interviewer was like, "Is it a memoir, what is it, fiction, non-fiction, memoir?" And she goes, "I guess first it was a memoir, yeah, but now it's just kind of like my first book." I was like, "This is how I'm going to start answering difficult questions."

Damona: No, because let me tell you something. She's not writing that book, is what it is. She has a ghostwriter. I'm actually writing this book myself.

Kara: Me too. But now, I'm just going to constantly, whenever people contact me to ask how the book is going I'm just like, depending on my mood I'm either going to be like, "It's a masterpiece if I do say so myself." Or I'm going to be like, "It's like a book." Just that's it. Those are the only two answers people are getting from now on.

Damona: I am sure it will be a masterpiece. I look forward to seeing you in 2024, if we can get out of these little boxes that we're in and actually see each other face-to-face.

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Kara: Well, thank you so much for talking to us. Everybody go follow Damona and listen to her podcast, and go work on your internalized bias whether you are dating or not. And check out, if you want to know how to do that more, I have a couple of episodes called How to – I don't know, search, internalized bias. How to be a better ally, dealing with internalized bias, just go Google, people, help yourselves, be resourceful. Talk to you next week.

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