

UFYB 248: Thick Thighs Save Lives



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

[UnF*ck Your Brain with 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. So, it may surprise some of you to know that I lift weights with a trainer twice a week. I don't know why that would surprise you but it just doesn't seem completely in keeping with my persona which mostly involves talking about how I hate getting sweaty and/or ever being hot and like to take a lot of naps. But I also lift weights. And I have to say I have learned so much about my brain and my nervous system from lifting.

And lifting has also really given me a way to think about how my brain works and how new neural patterns form. And the ways in which the body and the mind can work similarly. I think sometimes thought work is understood as being entirely cognitive, which is not really the case even though it's called thought work, at least not the way that we teach it and practice it around here. It really is about the mind body experience taken together.

And the way that we physically can train and change our bodies and our strength and build new patterns in our brain that sort of control our muscles tells us a lot about how our brains work too and how our thought patterns work too. And so, I'm really excited to share with you this actually pretty incredible conversation I had on the Thick Thighs Save Lives podcast which I will be not a podcast that I knew a lot about before I was invited to come speak on it.

And so, I really encourage you, whether you exercise or not to listen to this episode because if you do exercise and you do kind of work out, whatever that means, moving your body is exercise. But if you, let's just say do movement, targeted movement on purpose for the purpose of exercise and/or cardio, and/or lifting then you're definitely going to want to listen to

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this episode. But even if you don't, you're going to hear about how your brain needs training and conditioning just like your muscles do.

And we sort of talk about feminism, movement and exercise. We talk about society's unrealistic expectations of women and their bodies. We talk about how the pandemic has impacted women, the women's movement. We talk about how to redirect your thoughts, how to improve your confidence, how to redefine feminism. We really get into quite a lot. So, whether you are a huge follower already of Thick Thighs Save Lives, or whether you have never heard of it before this moment, I think you're really going to enjoy this thoughtful and interesting conversation that we had.

So, with no further ado I will let you guys start listening in.

Rachael: Guys.

Kelsea: Guys.

Rachael: Guys, we have a guest.

Kelsea: We're so annoying.

Rachael: I know I don't even care.

Kelsea: I don't care.

Rachael: You know what you can't curb my excitement. Don't try because they've tried before and no one's been successful. So, the guest that we had on today, well, I'll just say this, I'm going to try my best not to leave a little angry because that is my knee-jerk reaction when I feel like there are injustices. But the guest we had on today is so enlightening, and so

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important, and she is just a specialist in all of the things that make women, women and wire our brains. And it's like, I don't know, how did you feel?

Kelsea: I love having these conversations with women because, number one, sitting in a room with incredibly smart women is overall inspiring to me and our guest today is absolutely brilliant. And having just thought-provoking conversations about confidence in women and how we can have actionable changes to just living our best lives is something that I just live for. And she is brilliant

Rachael: So, her name is Kara Loewentheil and she is from the podcast Unf*ck Your Brain and the creator of The Clutch.

Kelsea: Right up our alley.

Rachael: Yeah, right up our alley, guys. Unf*ck Your Brain, come on, she is brilliant. She went to Yale and Harvard Law School. And actually, left her job as a lawyer to become a life coach. And to say she's brilliant that's an understatement. What she does is she basically hosts a coaching community that is feminist aimed and it's a revolution. It's to help women overcome insecurity, anxiety, impostor syndrome, people pleasing and their dependence on external validation.

And I think that those are things that are so ingrained in so many of us. And just the recognition that we can change those things, that we can adjust them, that we don't have to live under those constraints is mind-blowing and she is the woman to do it.

Kelsea: Yeah, I mean we can't talk about confidence without bringing her on. We can't even talk about rewiring the thoughts in our brain without bringing her on. And I think it's so empowering. I can't wait for you guys to listen, so empowering to know that you hold the keys to rewiring your brain so have a listen.

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Kara, we are so excited to have you on and we're going to jump right into it. So, you went from ivy school lawyer to the leader of a feminist revolution through your brand and business. Tell us how this happened and what drew you to now be your life's work?

Kara: I like that I'm just the leader of the feminist revolution. I do think it's the new – I call it the new feminist revolution. And anybody who's listening who's like, "Feminist, I don't know seems angry." Keep listening, going to teach you what the new feminism is about. So, I've been a professional feminist my whole life in one way or the other. I went to law school in order to do reproductive rights and women's health rights work. So, I was a litigator meaning I am basically, you know, went did legal work to protect women's right to access reproductive healthcare.

And then I became an academic and I kind of worked more on the ideas and theory around those legal rights. And then I, you know, the next normal step in the evolution towards law professor is you make a hard right turn right before the law professor part and you become a life coach instead. So that's what I did and my Jewish parents have almost recovered six years later. And so, then I became a coach. But for me it really is a continuation of the same work.

I have always been focused on empowering women to have control of their own lives and their own destinies. And I still wholeheartedly believe that requires being able to have control of their physical life and their physical destiny and deciding when, and whether, and how to bear children if they're going to. But I now more work on how to help women empower themselves mentally from the inside out and that's why I call it kind of the new feminist revolution because I think we have the existing focus on all the things in the world that need to change.

And I do think things in the world need to change but also if we don't change the way we've been taught to think about ourselves it really doesn't

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matter what changes in the outside world. So, if we replace every politician and every CEO and whatever with people from any marginalized identity, women and people of color, disabled people, whatever. If the thought processes that we learned about ourselves haven't changed we would just be in those positions doubting ourselves, criticizing ourselves, thinking we're not the authority, thinking we don't know what to do.

And so, to me the kind of new feminism is the thought process, the internal liberation. It's not replacing the social stuff. We need both but we need both we can't just focus on changing kind of the outside world. So that's how I ended up here.

Rachael: Oh, man, first of all I just want to thank you for the work you've done with women's reproductive rights, personally I want to thank you. And I also just want to say how insightful I think that that whole idea is. And I remember, I'm a former history teacher and I remember sitting my high school students down and asking them to raise their hand if they considered themselves a feminist. And I had almost no hands raised. And then giving the definition of what a feminist is and saying, "Why isn't everyone's hands raised?"

And you're exactly right that the common answer was, "Well, I'm not angry. I don't want to be mad at men. I don't hate anybody, Miss [inaudible]."

Kara: There's a feminism marketing problem which I'm always like, "Do you like being able to wear pants and vote? Congratulations, you are a feminist. Do you like being able to have a credit card without your dad having to guarantee it? Congratulations, you're a feminist. Redefine it and explain to people what it actually means.

Rachael: But that's that internal work that we need to do before and not before, simultaneously but it has to be done at the same time because if you're sitting in a classroom of high school students. And two out of 30

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consider themselves feminist I mean we're like we have internal things going on that need to be adjusted. So, in your coaching you talk about women and the need to literally rewire their thought processes and their patterns to be able to live with what you call authentic confidence.

So first of all, yes, I'm here for it, but before we get there I think it's important that people can recognize and identify the social conditionings that may be currently holding them back. Because I think that it's step one, recognize it in yourself. So, can you help some of the ladies that might be listening identify some of these behaviors in themselves? What do, like commonly what do these look like?

Kara: Yeah, absolutely. And I'll say the way that I teach it is sort of if you're socialized as a woman, so you may have been socialized as a woman and still identify as a woman. You might be non-binary. You might be a trans woman. But if you've been exposed to what, when we say socialized, that sounds like this big word. It really just means, what did you learn from society about like what your identity group is? What did you learn women are like? What did you learn men are like?

You also learned everybody was one or the other at least when we were growing up, there wasn't an acknowledgement of the gender binary, the gender spectrum yet. What were you taught about people of color? What were you taught about disabled people? What were you taught about fat people? Whatever identity you live in you just are taught things sometimes explicitly. Your parents or teachers will just be like, These kinds of people are like this. And these kinds of people are good at that and bad at this.”

But also, you learn it implicitly which means no one's saying it to you but you're looking at the government and being like that's mostly old white men who are interested in that. Or you are, like the kindergarten teachers in your school are all women but then all the administrators are all men. Or all of these sort of implicit lessons that we just pick up on without even thinking

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about it of who's important, who's smart, who is a leader, who is authoritative. These are all things we just learn through osmosis just from seeing what's around us which is why I didn't grow up...

I grew up in a family that was very focused on my education, my achievement. Nobody was ever saying, "You don't need to go to college, just get married." That was not the vibe in my house at all. But I still live in a world that has certain expectations. So, in terms of how they show up I think what's tricky about it is because a lot of it is implicit, it's not like we got a flyer at school that said women are bad at math and shouldn't be in charge of things. But it's implicit, we don't recognize it in our own mind.

So, I always say that like, "If what you heard in your brain was some 1950 male announcer voice being like women can't be trusted with money." Then you would know not to listen to that but that's not what you hear. What you hear is just your own voice saying things like, I'm irresponsible with money or I shouldn't make that big of a decision, or maybe I shouldn't, I don't know what I'm supposed to spend the money on. Or money is hard and I don't understand it. So, I'm just not going to think about it because I feel bad when I do.

It shows up sounding like your own voice and you just think it's your own true thoughts about yourself and you don't even recognize it. So, the things to look out for are like how often are you doubting yourself? How often are you thinking that you aren't good enough at something, can't do something, aren't smart enough, need someone else to validate all your decisions? How often are you people pleasing?

I think one of the most, like almost the foundational thing that women are taught that we learn about women in our society is that their value comes from being of service to others, helping and serving other people. And so that makes us hyper focused on what everybody else thinks about us. So, we have this contingent confidence, meaning I'm only allowed to feel good

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about myself, it's contingent on – there's that tweet going around that's like I just need everyone who knows me to tell me they're not mad at me every half hour for the rest of my life.

It's like that is our confidence is so shaky because it's like I can only be confident if I have heard nothing, I've only heard good things about myself in the last 24 hours. And I think everybody I know is pleased with me. Then the minute something looks different in the mirror, or someone's upset, or we, whatever, then the whole thing falls down like a pack of cards. So that's how to know your confidence isn't internal yet. It's still external and it's based on the shaky platform that's all going to collapse at a moment's notice.

Kelsea: Well, that, honestly that's so insightful too because there's so many levels of confidence. And there's so many process that we have to go through where you start out by testing the waters with some external confidence. And even that step is a lot for a lot of women where we haven't even internalized it, we haven't got that far. It's just hanging by a thread if everyone thinks we are okay, or if we're doing well, or if we've gotten a promotion, or if no one's mad at us at that very moment, we can have a second of confidence.

Kara: Right, [inaudible] exactly right today, I'm allowed to like myself for 30 seconds.

Kelsea: Or you've met like for a lot of our women their goal weight that's like, "Oh, I'll be confident when I get there." Or when you do get there you're like, "Oh, I'm allowed to be confident now." And it's like wait a minute.

Kara: Yeah. And so many people find that that doesn't stick because the problem is that you have. This goes to the rewiring your brain. Your brain is like a muscle so you know if you if you work out, you can't do a deadlift a

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certain way 6,000 times. And then think that if you walk into a new gym your body's going to do that deadlift in a totally different way all of a sudden just because that circumstance is different. It's a learned pattern in your muscles. And the more we're learning about the brain and body connection. It's a learned pattern in your brain.

Your brain controls your nervous system, controls your muscles, controls how much weight you put on the inside corner of your left foot when you're doing the squat. All of that is wired into your brain and so you can't shit on yourself all the way down to your goal weight and then be like, "Okay, now the magic. I walked into the new weight and now my brain will tell me confident thoughts."

That's not how that works so you get like a rush of excitement when you first hit it, whatever the thing is. It could be the amount you want to bench press, it could be your lifting goal, it could be the weight loss, it could be this, the time on your mile, whatever it is. You'll get a rush of excitement because your brain is like, "We finally got to the place where we're going to be happy and nice to ourselves forever. We are finally going to feel good.

But if you have been mean to yourself all the way and you've been trying to motivate yourself with self-criticism and negative self-talk that shit is going to kick right back in. That's what you've trained your brain to do.

Kelsea: Yeah, I mean we talk to our ladies so much about that because we try and warn them before they get there. Because we're like, "You're going to get to this place and realize it is not what you made it out to be in your mind." If your road there is all of these like backwards way of shaming yourself towards confidence, you're going to get to that 'goal weight'. And you're going to realize that confidence wasn't waiting for you there.

Kara: Right, yes.

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Kelsea: Yeah, it wasn't waiting in this body you had in your mind.

Kara: It's not waiting anywhere except in your own brain and you have to create it. It's not even waiting your brain. In your brain you at least have the ingredients and you can make the recipe if you work on it. But you cannot just buy it, it's not like an omelet, you can't just get one at the store instead of making it at home.

Kelsea: Yes, that's a perfect segue into our next question of like there has been multiple studies about the confidence gap. Basically, studies show men consistently overestimate their abilities and performance while women consistently underestimate in both of these areas despite their performance not different in quality. So, were we wired this way? Is this socialization? And kind of how can we unf*ck ourselves?

Kara: Yeah. I think we're socialized but when we talk about wiring we have to think about what that means. I think people often use that, they'll say hardwired meaning you came out of the womb like that. You've got blue eyes, and brown hair, and insecurity. But actually, our socialization wires us not in a way that has to be permanent. But we've all heard I think at this point, neurons that fire together wire together. But you're just teaching your brain.

It's like conditioning your body to do a certain movement a certain way, when this comes up that's got to go back, or when I contract this muscle I've got to release this one. It's just wired together to these things go together. And so, all that socialization when we're not aware of it does kind of wire our brains. I don't think it's hardwired in that way because I think we can change it. This is, the fancy word for this is neuroplasticity. It just means your brain's ability to change over time.

Which crazy people used to think not that long ago, a few decades ago that sort of basically once your brain developed as a child that was it, it couldn't

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change anymore which makes no sense when you think about it. Since people have learned new things for their whole lives through human history but okay. We thought that was some different system or something. So that's kind of the good news is no matter how long you have been thinking in a certain way you can always still change it.

I mean I have women in The Clutch which is my coaching community, my feminist coaching community who are 70 in fine thought work and are like, "Okay, I want to change this now." I mean it really is never too late but it is a process. When you think about how many times, it's like if you have bad body image, if you think about how many times have you had the thought about how your stomach looks bad? I mean you probably think it 15 times a day, and how long have you been alive?

Kelsea: Yeah, I was going to say per day.

Rachael: Yeah, per hour.

Kara: Right. [Crosstalk] 365 in a year and you've been doing it for 20 years. So, it'll take a minute. I'm always coaching my students that we'll get to the thought and they'll be like, "I just don't believe that now." And I'm like, "Yeah, you just heard it 20 seconds ago and you've been thinking this other thought six million times so we're going to need to practice." The good news I think, the part that is like a miracle is that you don't have to think it as many times as the old thought for it to start to feel more true. You don't have to match it one for one.

Rachael: Yes, that's great news. This is great news.

Kara: Right, just like if you don't have enough time left [Crosstalk]. Or you've been doing an exercise wrong for 20 years, your form's been wrong. It's going to take a lot to correct it but you don't have to literally do one for one of all the ways you did it with the wrong form before. You just have to

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do it enough and consistently enough until your neural map, your brain map kind of updates and is like, oh, this is what we're doing now. Okay, this is now the easier thing to think. This is the form is now automatic. I've now learned it enough that I will just do it by default. So, you literally have to practice thinking different thoughts.

And this might be one of your follow-up questions so I'm just going to go there anyway. The biggest mistake people make especially if they are part of any kind of inspirational community I think, like coaching people, fitness people, anybody who likes to be inspired is that they're trying to believe new thoughts that are too far from what they currently believe. So, you see some Pinterest graphic that's like every day is an amazing opportunity to love myself wholly. And you're like, "That's what I want to think and feel." But right now, you have 65 thoughts a day about what a terrible person you are.

That's just too big, it's too big. That's why we don't go from trying to lift two pounds to trying to deadlift 400. We've got to build up. You don't go from I have never walked to I am going to run a marathon. And even if you do, you've got to practice. You don't just get up and run 26 miles. So, you've got to really pick thoughts that are kind of baby thoughts, or I call them neutrals thoughts, but a little step, just a little step, like my stomach is disgusting. Okay, let's just practice thinking this is a human stomach, or even if I don't like my stomach today I'm still worthy of respect ,or whatever.

We're just going to like a little bit, practice a thought that's a little bit, I would say it could feel a little good, or it could just honestly feel 10% less bad, that's good enough to start to rewire the brain.

Rachael: I think that it's really hard first of all when you see kind of the life you want to be living and you say, "Okay let's do that, yeah, let's do that right now, right now, yeah, tomorrow when I wake up." And it's really hard news I think to hear that it's going to take some time. I think that that is the

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number one thing that people do not want to hear. They do not want to hear it's going to take some time. They do not want to hear it's going to take a lot of practice.

But it is also a really hopeful idea that all of this that has been going on for all of these years it doesn't have to turn around in one day. That's so much pressure.

Kara: Yeah. And half the people don't do it, they don't start, they don't change because it's too much pressure.

Rachael: Exactly and that is a totally paralyzing thought of well how can I go from who I am now, I literally hate myself, to the person who wakes up loving themselves every day? I don't see that happening so I'm just not even going to start. And I think that it's a really hopeful thought that we can just 10% not as terrible is progress in the right direction.

Kara: And that's how you build on it, yeah. But also, I think the whole reason we want something to change right away is that we want what I call an exit ramp off the human experience. The human experience is that sometimes you feel great and sometimes you feel terrible. And sometimes life feels amazing and beautiful and sometimes it feels awful. And that is just the mixed bag of being a human. But we all want the fuck off that, we're all like, "Where do I..."

Rachael: It's bumpy.

Kara: Yeah, it's bumpy.

Rachael: [Crosstalk] too bumpy.

Kara: We're like, "Where do I get off? " And so, when we're in a hurry to get some place, to hit a fitness goal, to change our body, to make money, to

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change our self-talk even, whatever it is. When we're in a rush it's because we subconsciously think, when I get there I'm going to be off the exit. That's the exit ramp. That's how I'm going to feel.

So, I always tell people when they're gripping a goal too tightly, I'm like, "I just want you to imagine you have your ideal body whatever it is, you have your ideal body, you hit that, you made the Olympics, whatever it is. And you're in an Olympic Village and you're still crabby, or you're still in a bad mood, or you still woke up and you don't like what you see in the mirror that day. The next day you're going to feel great."

But it's like whatever it is you're trying to get to, that rush is because you think it's going to be better there than here. And yes I do think life can be better that's why I do all of this work. I think we can be more empowered. We can be happier. We can create things that blow our minds that we didn't know we could. Anybody who is super into fitness also has experienced that. That's all great and you will still be a human. And it's still going to be, we can build our resilience so that it's just a bumpy ride, as opposed to like an out of control rollercoaster.

But the rush comes from the fantasy that there's some way to completely get off the ride entirely and just feel amazing all the time.

Kelsea: Yeah, I mean so I don't know, you're the expert. I don't know if this is right or wrong. But something that I keep reminding myself in all of these moments is that they're always temporary. We were filming something yesterday and I was just having a day where I just did not like my face. And that's not that I forever hate it and never want to be on camera again. It's like I said to the girl I was filming with I was like, "I don't want to see my face today. I'm sick of it. I'm so over this."

Kara: [Crosstalk] whole face thing.

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Kelsea: Yeah, this whole face thing. I don't want to see it. Stop showing it to me, whatever you recorded, make it go somewhere else. But for me is something that I have found helpful to kind of keep getting back up is being like this is temporary. You won't feel like this forever. Tomorrow we could come in and I'll be like, "Oh, someone take a picture of me. I am so hot."

Kara: Yeah, it is a super helpful tool. I think there's also practice thoughts and stuff you can practice when you are in that space. But that is like that temporal, I mean that's what meditation teaches you. No thought or feeling is permanent, it's going to come and go. And that's true about the happy ones too. I think sometimes in America especially where we're very positive and optimistic. We're like, "Well here's what I'll take from meditative traditions. Negative feelings come and go but happy ones can always be here. No, they all come and go all of them."

Kelsea: [Crosstalk] ones.

Kara: Yeah, [crosstalk], I'll let the bad ones come and go. No, one minute you're going to love your partner and you'll be filled with happiness. You can't believe, you're the luckiest person in the world. And five minutes later you're like, "If you don't stop chewing like that I'm going to strangle you with my bare hands." That same person, and then the next day you'll like him again. That's it. So, I 100% think that's so important, none of this is permanent. None of it is the good or the bad. It is just a cycle of feeling good and bad, and good and bad forever until you die and that's it.

But if you just can accept that then it's okay, do I want to feel good and bad, and good and bad, like meeting my fitness goal, blowing my own mind about what's possible, making a million dollars, loving myself, whatever? It takes all the pressure off the goal and you can really enjoy the goal for what it is which is just a chance to change your beliefs about what's possible for you and grow and evolve because we might as well do something while we're here feeling good and bad, and good and bad, and

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good and bad for the rest of our lives. We might as well also have some fun.

Rachael: Sure. I mean we're here anyways.

Kara: Exactly. I'm here anyway so I want to see what I can do while I'm here.

Rachael: I love that. I love it. And I do really love the idea of just taking the pressure off of even just like your life, take the pressure off of it and realize. Yeah, just I think, okay, so along those lines we had talked a little bit about – because there are, as you mentioned in the beginning there are certain characteristics that women tend to display. You said the people pleasing, and the other one that I really wanted to hit on for a second was perfectionism because I don't know if it's the kind of women that we coach in our group.

But there seems to be, or if this is where society is at right now but oh my God, people are just struggling so bad with women in specific with the fact that they are not perfect. And I remember I had read this study, it was a long time ago. I think it was HP or some computer company was studying their promotions system and who applied for a promotion. And they studied it by gender. And men would apply for a promotion when they met about 60% I think of the requirements.

Kara: Over the different studies it's 40 to 60%.

Rachael: Okay, you know this.

Kara: Men will apply for a job when they meet 40 to 60% of the criteria. And women will apply for a job when they meet 90 to 100% of the criteria. No, I work in plumbing and this is a job application for the head of GM and they both involve pipes so I'm in.

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Rachael: Close enough.

Kara: Yeah, and women will be like, “I have all of the required qualifications but I only have half of the nice to have or bonus ones so I'm not applying.”

Rachael: So, this didn't surprise me but the things that surprise you in the way that just make you so angry and they remind you to be angry. So that's what happened to me when I read about this. And I was just like, “This is so much of the mentality of I'm going to wait until...”

Kara: I think that women are taught, men are taught, go out and get what you want, make it happen. Women are taught, behave and someone will reward you.

Rachael: That hurts. I'm not going to get angry in this episode. I'm not going to do it. I'm an Enneagram 8 and I'm quick to anger but I'm going to try my best.

Kara: That's one of those, if that meme of, I'm in this picture and I don't like it was a live podcast moment. But that's what we're taught. And so of course they're not going to, women are much more likely to wait for someone to recognize them, reward them, promote them, and not go after it. And this is a place where it's important to say there's both. There's internalized stuff and there's external stuff. So, there's also studies showing that women are sometimes penalized when they do speak up for themselves, or ask for raises, or ask for promotions.

But we can't just let the conversation stop there. Okay, there's some workplaces where that happens. There are also some workplaces where that won't happen. And we all have to be part of the change of making this so common and normalized that women can't be punished for it. We can't just sort of take well, there is discrimination in the outside world and make that mean that we're just going to give up then. And I think that

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perfectionism is, yeah, I think I mean for sure coaching communities disproportionately are full of perfectionists.

I assume the non-perfectionists are just out there enjoying their lives [crosstalk]. I don't know what they're doing. They're just doing A minus job and feeling great about it [crosstalk]. But I think women are more likely to be perfectionists because women are the ones who are taught that their worth and value are contingent. It's not inherent, it's what other people think of you. So, humans have a very intense desire to belong. There's evolutionary biology reasons, there's whatever.

And if you tell someone your acceptance by your people, whoever they are, depends on how good you are and how good you act. You don't have an inherent worth or value it depends what other people think of you. That's a recipe for perfectionism. How are you going to not end up with a bunch of perfectionists?

Rachael: Because how can you belong?

Kara: Yeah. But it's also, I mean that perfectionism can become, that's what people want to be their exit ramp. If I'm finally just, if I do all these things perfectly then I'll finally feel good about myself. And like that's not how it works because your brain can always find some shit you're not doing well. All of a sudden you could do everything on your list and your brain will be like, "You should really be a ukulele player though. Have you played ukulele? No, you're bad at it."

You have to think about your brain as it just runs whatever program you've given it. We act like we are making rational negotiated deals with our brain. Our brain is a rational actor we can negotiate with, where our brain is like, "You have to do x, y, z and then I'll give you the feel good." And we're like, "Okay, I did x, y, z. Where is the feel good?" And your brain's like, "I have

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no idea who made that deal with you. I don't know. I didn't have anything to do with that. You haven't done it yet.”

No, you don't negotiate with terrorists, that's what your brain is. That's not what's happening. Your brain is just running a program. So, if what you've told your brain is, “If I'm unhappy it must be because I'm not good enough so I've got to get better to get happy. “Your brain will run that program all the time. And because it's normal like we just said, being a human means some days you wake up and hate your face or whatever. Your brain will just keep running that program all the time.

You had an emotion, you had a negative feeling, it must be because you weren't good enough. Here's how you've got to be better. Your brain is not evaluating the evidence and giving you useful feedback. It is just running whatever program you taught it. And so, you can't perfectionist your way into feeling good about yourself. You have to change the way you think about yourself.

Kelsea: Yeah. That's really interesting. Do you have any thoughts on any actionable steps on how we might fight these tendencies?

Kara: Yeah. Don't try to fight them because that language, whenever we think about – what we try to do is we're like “Okay, I'm not going to think the bad thoughts.” But your brain doesn't know how to carry out that instruction especially because...

Kelsea: It's like telling someone to calm down.

Kara: Right, it doesn't help.

Kelsea: It's like, I didn't think of that.

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Kara: Right. And just logically if you tell your brain not to think a thought in order to check, your brain has to think the thought in order to see if you're thinking it or not. So, you have to think it. There's no, that doesn't work. So, it's not avoid, it's redirect because we get we get into this, sometimes people discover thought work or changing their brain. And then they just get very like, "Oh, my God, another negative thought is coming."

They turn that into a perfectionist exercise which again you're a human, you're going to have negative thoughts sometimes. I still have self-critical thoughts sometimes. It's okay, they come and they go. We're not going to fight them, resist them and try to punch it out with them. We're just going to redirect. It's like if toddler is screaming...

Rachael: I literally was just going to say.

Kara: Yeah, escalate or de-escalate the situation. That's not how we deal with that. Your toddler's screaming in the grocery store and you start screaming, and throwing things, and trying to shove them. This does not make the situation any better. You have to just redirect. So, I have an episode on my podcast, my podcast is Unf*ck Your Brain and the episode is The Thought Ladder. And so that walks you through this kind of process of how can you find a new thought you can believe and then practice that all the time. But that's what it is, it means you've got to redirect to a new thought.

That neural circuit you can't just be like, "No." That's the path. If you think about it like a car that's driving, if there's only one path the car has to go down the one path. Where is the car supposed to go? You can't stop the car. In real life you can stop the car and not drive down a path. With your brain the car has got to go somewhere. So, if there's only one path that's where it's going, it doesn't matter how much you yell no. But you can create a new path and redirect the car down the new path over and over.

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And then eventually the old one gets like grown over with vines, and leaves, and thickets. And then the new one is nice, and smooth, and clear and that's where your brain goes.

Rachael: I love that you said a believable thought too because I think that that's where a lot of people get. They try to go the opposite way, if they hate their face then they try to go, "No, I'm the most beautiful thing on Earth."

Kara: Right. You don't believe that though.

Rachael: Like you said, let's build a bridge.

Kara: Yeah. Your brain is just – I mean brains do not like to do things without some payoff. So, it's just very hard to convince. I mean maybe there are people who are able to just repeat really aspirational affirmations over and over from sheer discipline until they believe them. But I'm not that person. So, finding that thought that you can really believe which is something very neutral and factual, or even just – I mean a really powerful one often that works for everything is just it's possible my brain is wrong about this.

It's possible my brain is wrong about my fac, it's possible. If you write down a list of shit your brain has been wrong about before, that's a long list.

Kelsea: It's true. It's not a reliable source.

Kara: No, it's not a reliable source but it always acts like it is. It acts like it has no idea what you're talking about. It's always been reliable. It's always told you the truth. Yeah it's just your brain is just...

Rachael: Total narcissist.

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Kara: Yeah, it has no memory. It's just gaslighting you all the time. I mean I try not to get into that because I think sometimes that makes people get in an adversarial relationship with their brain which isn't helpful either. Your brain's just trying to do what a brain tries to do. This thing evolved over millions of years. It's kind of a mess up there and there's like some loose wiring, all the parts don't really work together right. It's like Jell-O sack with electricity going through it. It's just not always going to come up with the best thing.

Rachael: Also, you slept two hours last night so come on.

Kara: Yeah, [crosstalk] and you jacked it up and then you were like, “Make good decisions.” And your brain's like. “Ah.”

Kelsea: Make good decisions and quickly.

Kara: Yeah. And tell me the truth about everything in the world. Your brain's like, “I don't even I don't even know where my nose is, [crosstalk], it's very confusing.” So, your brain getting into the habit of just being not just taking – your brain just acts like it's reporting the weather. It's like, “Hey, it's going to be 62 degrees, you're dumb and your face is ugly.” It's just telling you the truth. But it's not just reporting the weather. Those are optional thoughts you're having that you can learn to change.

So just getting that practice and being like, “Huh, my brain has said a lot of nonsense today, let's see. Ten minutes ago, I was pretty sure that that traffic jam was going to ruin my life forever but now it's over and I've totally forgotten about it.” So, it's almost like my brain wasn't right about that. Looking for the places your brain is wrong, it gives you that exact thing we were talking about of just being like this comes and goes. And that will always happen.

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I had a total freakout this morning about something very uncharacteristic for me. But I have done this enough now that I was like, “Okay, this is interesting. I see my brain wanting to, like I want to urgently reach out and talk to 12 different people about it and get different blah blah blah. I'm freaking out and now I want to do all this math.” And it was about taxes. And then I was like, “It's possible this feeling does not actually mean that something has gone wrong. But that I actually have a problem. And now it's two hours later and I'm like, “It's fine, there's plenty of money.”

I didn't even have to coach myself just for this one. It was just letting it run through without reacting to it and getting all agitated about it.

Rachael: Sometimes you've just got to wait an hour.

Kelsea: That's a good example, because I'm like, “Kelsea do you need to act on this right now? Could you...”

Rachael: [Crosstalk] period.

Kara: Urgency is always a key to not act on it. If you are urgently trying to take action that's when you're trying to get away from a feeling and it's always a good sign to slow down.

Kelsea: That's a great point. That's a great point for me personally.

Kara: Yeah, [crosstalk] fingers where you were a great lawyer, so when you feel like you've got to respond right now, you're trying to get out of a feeling that's a time to slow down.

Kelsea: Yeah. So, I did want to talk about the pandemic for a minute, to an impact this has had on the women's movement. I know we're still in the midst of a lot of it. And it's just undeniable that it's had effects on women's

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professional paths, self-confidence and overall mental health. Can you speak to this and how we might come back from this?

Kara: Yeah. I think this is a perfect example of there's external and internal stuff and both are important. So, we obviously have an external social problem of women's work not being valued as much, women pay disparities, women being the primary caretakers often. And so, you ended up with this social structural problem of a lot of women having to quit their jobs to stay home and homeschool their kids during the pandemic when the schools were closed.

And here's a lot of social structural stuff that goes into that. We don't have enough government or corporate support for working families. There's the social expectation that if somebody's going to quit their job it's going to be the woman, whatever the public policy was around the pandemic that created this. There's a lot of the external stuff which again we should totally be working on. And also, we can't solve the next 30 minutes and like that's a long ongoing problem.

On the internal side though I think that understanding how your brain works makes it a lot easier to weather external events. Because one of the things you start to see is that your brain it's just like when something amazing happens you do you have that upshoot of feeling great for a minute. And then your brain goes back to its normal thing. The same thing happens when something scary or bad happens, there is an initial panic, but also then your brain just kind of applies whatever the normal programs are to that situation.

So, it's like people who never had any health anxiety before were not that worried about COVID rightly or wrongly. People who had a lot of health anxiety before were very worried. People who had a lot of money anxiety before got very worried about money and because of the pandemic. People

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who didn't, didn't. So, none of this is about like what was even objectively true or not.

It's just that you've trained your brain to think a certain way so if we take it into a new gym just like the body doesn't magically totally change. Take the brain into a new situation a lot of it is going to be kind of your normal thought patterns. But that makes it so much easier to not kind of buy your brain's kind of story that everything is now an emergency, you have to panic, you need to feel panicked for three years straight, you need to freak out.

Our brain responds especially to life or death threats with just a lot of anxiety because that's supposed to motivate us to run away. But when you're dealing with a pandemic that is not really what you're going to do. It's not like a speeding car where like your fast reflexes make you jump out of the way. This is a chronic ongoing threat and risk issue that people have to manage that you more need your prefrontal cortex to make decisions, not your jump out of the way of a fast-moving thing, reflexes.

And so, I think having that ability to manage your brain, not be reactive, be able to allow your emotions to flow. Be able to choose what to believe on purpose is really what gets people through the hardest times. This is why I think it's so – it's just so misguided and misunderstanding when people think that coaching, or thought management, or mindset stuff, or whatever is a luxury. And I'm like, “It is like you don't need it when shit's all going well, and good, and everything's easy. That's not when, that's what – a luxury item is like a car that's fancier than you need.”

You don't need, mindset work is not that important when everything's going great although it still is because you still have a human brain. But when it really is clutch is when everything is falling apart and that's how you develop emotional resilience to whatever's happening around you. And I'm not sure, do we know when the podcast is coming out?

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Kelsea: Yeah. This will come out in May, the second week in May.

Kara: So, I think that a lot of people are feeling extremely burned out now. And we can't change the whole world but you can change the reaction to things. And so, for instance, I'm doing this thing right now called the 2022 Burnout Breakthrough which is all about how do you change the way you're thinking and reacting to the world so that you can prevent and heal burnout, create more energy even when the world is not cooperating.

Kelsea: That is very timely and I feel like the weight of the last couple of years has been really heavy for a lot of people. And then coming out of that and just being like, "Hey, you're fine now. Just everything's cool, you shouldn't feel burnt out. Go enjoy the things that you like in this world." It's just the most unrealistic expectation that I have ever heard. And I hear a lot of women who are just talking to themselves in that way. "I don't know why I haven't been able to bounce back. I don't know why I feel so tired all the time."

And really it's that internal blame of it must just be me. And my assumption of running a challenge like this is it's not just you guys.

Kara: It's not just you and also part of the problem is women – it is that socialization where women are taught and trained to like do everything for everybody else, to feel guilty about ever taking time for themselves, to feel guilty about ever spending money on themselves especially if they have kids or a family. And so all of that, there's a part of it that is just learning how to wrangle a human evolved brain that wants to freak out all the time an learning how to make that rollercoaster into more of like a child's ride in a theme park just a little bumpy.

And then part of it is also seeing the ways in which a lot of women do know when they're getting burnt out. And they do know what might help but they don't feel able to do it because they don't feel comfortable taking time for

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themselves, or saying no to that thing, or letting their kid just watch TV for the morning, even though it's not the most enriching activity in the world. Because they just really need a break. There is a lot of guilt and shame because and we haven't even talked about this.

But there's so much socialization around being a perfect mother, and being fully subservient to your child, and all of that. So, my goal with the challenge really is to address both those things, to teach people practices they can use that address both of those problems, having your brain just be out of control and creating a lot of stress. And even if I teach, this is why you have to bring this lens in. I can teach you what to do to calm your brain down, to reset your nervousness, blah blah, blah.

But if your next thought is, I can't do that because I have to make the cupcakes for the whole class tomorrow. I have to do this other thing for this other person. I'm not allowed to do that. But it doesn't matter what I teach you. We have to address both parts of it.

Rachael: It's so weird when like, I don't know, maybe this is just a me problem. But sometimes all roads seem to lead to guilt and shame, every path.

Kara: Yeah. [Crosstalk] the same whichever direction you go you end up at shame.

Rachael: I know that we heard a lot of this from the fitness community from women specifically when they were taking on all of these jobs of teacher and this ridiculous amount of load. Obviously their fitness was falling by the wayside. And what so many people said was, "I got my COVID 15", or whatever everybody's calling it. And it was like how I felt it was it was like every road led to shame. Because if I went to work out and turned on the TV then that then I'm shamed because I'm a bad mom.

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And if I didn't then I'm going to turn around and go, "Wow, what has happened to my physical appearance?" And that is a shameful thing in its own right and it just felt like – it still feels like sometimes.

Kara: Yeah, perfectionism leads to burnout. I mean that's what that is. Perfectionism is I'm somehow supposed to do a homegrown enriching activity for my child, while also working out and maintaining this exact figure, while also I'm supposed to somehow do it all at once. So, I always say, "If your brain gives you two options and both of them are you're terrible, something's gone wrong. The math does not add up." And that is called a sack of shame exactly. And that's what creates burnout.

I mean that's why we're so exhausted. Burnout is created by just the constant mental rumination about how you are doing it wrong, not doing enough, should feel ashamed no matter what you're doing. And that has nothing to do with the pandemic because I've been coaching women for years on when I'm at work I feel bad that I should be with my kids. And when I'm with my kids I feel bad that I should be working. That had nothing to do with what was happening in the outside world.

Rachael: You're so right and when you said the things that were already there just came up bigger during the pandemic, they just bubbled to the surface. But they were already there. If you had health concerns they were, you know what I mean? It just enhanced it and I totally hear that. You talk about the term authentic confidence and living with authentic confidence. And first of all, I just love that term. And I was just wanting you to take a minute and just kind of talk about what this means in your mission. And honestly, maybe try to convince every person that this is a possibility.

Because honestly I really think that there are people, specifically women that hear that phrase and are like, "That sounds great but that's never going to happen."

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Kara: Yeah. So, when I say authentic confidence what I mean is not faking it till you make it. It's true confidence that comes from within. It is not based on everybody always agreeing with you, everybody always liking you, everybody always thinking you look good, everybody be approving of you, all of that. So, confidence really has to be, we call it confidence but what is at the root of confidence is actually just self-acceptance. I'm okay the way I am. I'm allowed to exist even if some people don't agree with how I am

There's really at the base of it, a lot of women feel like they're basically not allowed to exist if other people disapprove of them, or don't like what they're doing, or don't think they're attractive, or don't think they did a good job. Or just when we're mean to them in third grade and might still be thinking about that. If anybody in the world has a negative opinion of them. The thing to know about confidence though is that it's like we think we can't, it's like a circle. it's another cul-de-sac.

We think we can't have confidence because confidence is based on actually being good, or pretty, or smart, or whatever. It's like some objective thing. And if we don't have that then how could we be confident? But the truth is that confidence has really nothing to do with any kind of objectivity. It's just a thought pattern. It's just a way of thinking about yourself. So, I can be confident about my looks and so can Cindy Crawford, even though society has very different beliefs about our bodies and which one of us is more attractive.

It's not, if it was truly based on an external thing then only the person who is the best at each thing in the world would be allowed to feel confident. That's not how it works. It's just a thought pattern and the truth is women will often be like, "Well, I can't just, I mean let myself be confident even if I don't think it's true. What I'm just going to become an arrogant narcissist." I'm like, "First of all if you're even thinking about that that's not what's going to happen. Second of all, that's a personality disorder. It is not something that you give to yourself by thinking confident thoughts."

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And third of all, this is why I always focus on what results are we creating in our life? People could have completely said to me that it was completely delusional to think that I could love my body. People can't see me necessarily if they're listening to clips of this. But I live in a fat body in this world. And I quit running a thinktank to become a life coach. People could have said with plenty of seeming truth on their side. How could I possibly be confident about how I looked? How could I be confident that I was going to run a business, like that wasn't it a crazy thing to do.

And now I run a seven figure business. No reason to think that I was going to be able to do that. And I don't blame anyone who thought that. It seemed crazy, I agree. But truth is it's all subjective. It's just you and your brain going through life and no one is going to issue a ruling on whether you were truly allowed to feel confident, or were truly good enough, and 12 people will have different opinions.

So, you just get to decide do you want to go through life thinking you're a piece of shit or do you want to go through life having a friendship with yourself where you actually think that you are worthwhile? No one can tell you either way. So, you might as well just decide.

Kelsea: That always gets me in my feels because the most thing I hear from women is, "I wish I had that confidence." And I'm always like, "Stop wishing, it's not going to come, it's not the fairy, it's not going to come knocking on your door and come in." And it's really all about how you're going to decide to go through your life. And that doesn't mean it changes in a day. We've talked this entire episode about making those small changes and how it's work. And it just starts with 10% but it's worth it. And it's a decision that really starts with you.

Rachael: But I just liked that there was going to be nobody at the end deciding.

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Kelsea: There's no one at the end.

Rachael: But in my head there always is.

Kara: You're not going to get into heaven and they're going to be like, "Good job never letting your kid watch TV."

Rachael: It's so bizarre.

Kara: There's a reason I call it a certified letter from the universe. We're not getting a certified letter from the universe telling us if we did it right or wrong. But women want one because we're socialized to doubt ourselves, to not see ourselves as an authority, to believe that other people need to validate us. And when it comes to confidence also your people, like most of my clients, you're reporting to me that you're not allowed to be confident based on your brain's evaluation of how you 'truly are'.

We just agreed that your brain was full of bullshit. Your brain is not going to just spit out confidence. Your brain told you that because you burned the toast you were a failure as a wife. Brains are incredibly dramatic. They're basically flinging themselves onto Victorian fainting couches all the time. And that's fine. But we do not...

Rachael: Do you booboo?

Kara: Yeah. But we do not need to just take all that as the gospel truth. So, you basically, it's all a big circle. If you try to achieve your way to a place where you want your brain to spit out confidence but you haven't trained it to, it's just not going to. So divorcing confidence from having anything to do with some certified letter from the universe, somebody at the end, 10 Olympic judges holding up the numbers to be like, "You truly are smart enough to be allowed to think that about yourself."

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Rachael: The German judge hates me.

Kara: You're the only judge and you need to embrace that to create that confidence because otherwise you're just going to spend your whole life being down on yourself. And you're not getting an award for that when you die either.

Rachael: No, martyrs, did you hear that? You're not getting an award for that either.

Kara: There's no humble award at the end where they're like, "Good job never saying anything nice to yourself. Here's a cookie. "That's not how it works.

Rachael: No awards, terrible news honestly, terrible news.

Kara: My work here is done.

Kelsea: What you said about narcissists too, I said something that was like, "I look so awesome today." And I said to my best friend, I was like, "Was that really narcissistic?" And she was like, "I don't think narcissists ask themselves that question. So, you can start from there."

Kara: The big mistake people make is we're so used to ranking each other because women are socialized to compare themselves to each other all the time. We could have another whole podcast about this. Thinking that you are smart or pretty does not mean you think you're better and more worthy than other people. You're allowed to just think a positive thing about yourself and it does not imply that you are better than somebody else. We are all equally humanly worthy and also we're allowed to think nice things about ourselves.

Rachael: Imagine that concept.

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Kelsea: I did want to ask you one last question about, you mentioned your bio, true self love is a radical act for women. And this one just got me all up in my feels and just do we need to commit to being an outsider or a radicalist to truly live free and limitless?

Kara: Only in your own mind. I'm not out on a commune. I live in Brooklyn.

Kelsea: Just amongst us.

Rachael: She's one of us.

Kara: I live in Brooklyn. I am a straight woman. I have a male partner. That's pretty conventional. It's radical to accept your imperfect humanity as a woman because you are socialized, for everybody but I focus on helping women. Because we are socialized to think that our worth, and our value, and our ability to love ourselves or be loved by other people is all contingent on performing a certain way. And so it is a radical act. The truth is it's not even about – people think self-love is about thinking everything you do is great.

And that's so dangerous because then we'll all run each other with cars or like whatever insane slippery slope people go on to. Just like if I think that I'm not a disgusting pile of fat then I will become an arrogant sociopath. It like doesn't make any sense when you look at it. You're like, "This does what?" That's like saying if I cook one egg I'm going to turn into a French chef.

Kelsea: Yeah, if you drive a car you're going to be a race car driver.

Kara: Yeah. These things are not related but anyway people think that self-love is that. They think it's this thinking everything you do is great, not, whatever. And to me self-love, your relationship with yourself is like any other long-term relationship in your life. It doesn't mean you're always

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thrilled with yourself. It doesn't mean you only have positive thoughts about yourself. But you have a foundation of acceptance, and regard, and love, just like you do with a long term partner or a long term friend.

My best friends, my boyfriend, I don't love every single thing they do. I don't have only positive thoughts about them. I have days when we have a fight, or I'm just irritated, or I don't like their face or whatever. But I never make that mean that they're not worthy of love, that they aren't worthy as a human, that they have to like change in order for me to love them. Now, obviously some of us do, do that in our external relationships. But that's a mirror of our relationship with ourselves.

So, to me self-acceptance self-love, don't turn it into, it's not an exit ramp off the human condition either. It's not like this destination you can get to where you always feel good about yourself and then you never feel sad or bad. And you did it perfectly. It just means having like a long term friendship with yourself where even if you had a rough day with yourself, you were a little mean to yourself, you didn't like how you looked, you snapped at somebody and now you regret it, whatever.

That's still in the context of I love you, I respect you, I care for you, I'm here with you and holding that space for yourself throughout your life. In the feels again.

Kelsea: It's just I just think that these things, sometimes they can seem so far away and they can seem so idealistic. And they can seem so just far out of our league. But really when you break it down I just hope that everybody leaves with a little bit of hope that these things are absolutely 100% possible in your life. And you can live this life. And it, I don't know, I just think that that really changes the game. And if you are a radicalist like me and you say like, "Well, if this makes me freaking different and if this makes me a rebel then I'm going to do it."

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Then you go your path, girlfriend, whatever you've got to do because this is the good stuff, man. This is the stuff that makes your life worth living. It's important stuff. Kara, thank you so much for being with us. I think this was so insightful. And I honestly I really think that there's going to be huge mindset shifts for people that listen to this because it really is information that I think just every woman should hear.

Kara: I'm so glad thank you for having me on.

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