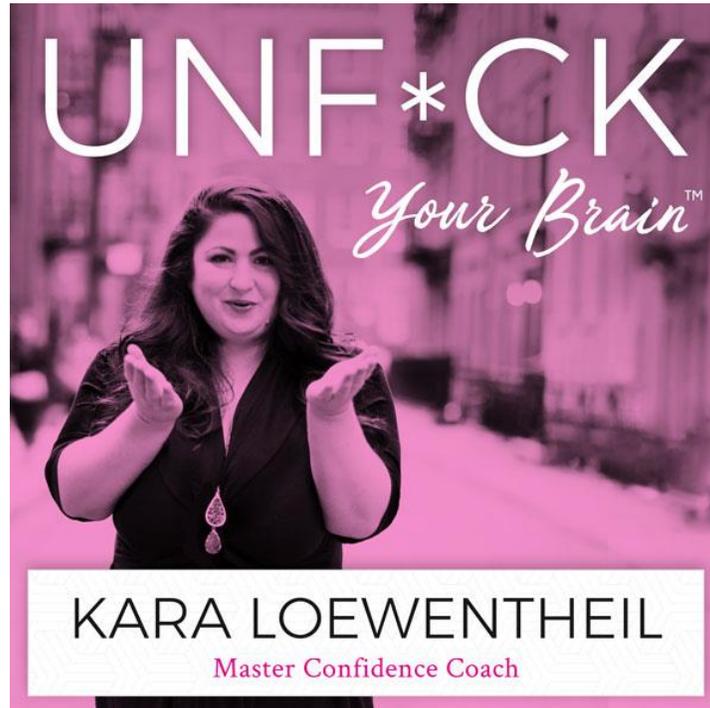


**UFYB 258: Myths About Women in Midlife:
A Conversation with Karen Anderson,
Elizabeth Sherman and Jill Angie**



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.

All right y'all. My chickens, today we are getting into a whole period of life, a mood of several decades. And I'm really excited about this episode and this conversation because one of my, pet peeves isn't the right word because I'm not upset with people about this. I'm upset with society, which is always the case.

But one of the things that just breaks my fucking heart is how often women who are in midlife, or middle age, or honestly like 30 or 35, which really has not been middle age since like the 1800s, start having this thought pattern that their life is over. That it's too late to change things. That their lot in life is chosen, they are who they are. And I find that that just gets worse and worse over time.

Now, obviously this is a thought pattern so some people don't have it, which is awesome because I think there are amazing incredible women of every age who are starting new careers, or learning new hobbies, or creating new art projects, or learning new sports, or starting to lift weights at 90. Just doing incredible kick-ass things which is amazing and inspiring, I think.

But I see so many women who's thought process is that it's sort of they're over the hump, it's all downhill. And that is just so tragic to me. I was having a conversation with a woman I know the other day who is in her early 60s and divorced. And she was talking about dating in this way that was sort of like it's already too late for me to meet someone, my life is almost over. I

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was like, even if you live to just be 80 that's like 18 to 20 years of your life left. That's a huge amount of time.

Think about all the shit that happened to you when you were between 0 and 20, or between when you were 20 to 40, or between when you were 40 to 60. So much can happen in that time and so to kind of declare that it's already over for you is just a mindset that I think is going to contribute to feeling old and out of the loop in a negative way.

I think there are incredible things that we can look forward to and celebrate about aging and getting older, especially as a woman. I give fewer fucks every year and I cannot wait to give fewer and fewer fucks as I go forward. But we have to change the narrative and the thought process around that because society tells women that essentially once they are no longer in the prime of their supposedly fuckable or fertile years then they don't matter anymore, right? Then it's just over.

And that is some fucking bullshit, I'm not here for it. And I see so much how this is not a truth about the world. One of the things I hear middle aged women often say is that they feel invisible. Which is also just fascinating because it's often based on things like I don't get sexually harassed on the street by construction workers anymore.

Which is like the idea that what we have done to women's brains is teach them that being visible and valuable is indicated by being sexually harassed. And that if that's not happening you are therefore invisible in a bad way. I mean that's like we could have a whole episode just about the clusterfuck of that thought pattern. But if you're having it, that's not to blame you at all, that is how society is telling you.

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But the truth is when you believe you're invisible you become invisible to yourself and then you will be less visible to other people as well. And these are mindsets that can be changed. So if you are a woman in midlife, or at any point in life, and this is resonating with you I want you to make sure you are on the wait list for The Clutch for the next time that we open to the public. Which we only do twice a year.

So we were open in April for about a week for folks to join. And then we've been digging in and doing amazing work with all of the chickens who joined in April. And then we are going to opening up again this fall for about a week, weekend really, for people to join again. Now we're closed again until next spring.

So you're going to want to get on that wait list. And I want to address the question I get a lot, which is like well am I too old to join The Clutch? Will there be other people my age? We have people everywhere from like 18, 19 year olds to women in their 70s.

It's truly like an incredible generationally diverse place, among many other forms of diversity. There are women in there of all ages. And there are women who are in there with their moms and with their daughters, like it is just a really incredible community in that way. And so do not fear, you will not be the oldest one there. And if you were, that would be awesome. I hope that we have somebody who's 90 in the Clutch doing thought work soon.

So if you want to get on that wait list you want to text your email to +1 347 934 8861. That's +1 347 934 8861, and you don't need a code word or anything, you just text us that email address and you will get put on the wait

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list. Or you can go to unfuckyourbrain.com/clutch.

Unfuckyourbrain.com/clutch and you'll be put on the wait list there.

And when you're on the wait list that means that you will find out the minute we open up again for the public to join. And you want to be on that list because we don't stay open for very long, it's just a couple of days. So you don't want to be missing it.

All right my friends, we are going to get into it with some of my students talking all about thought work and midlife. Let's go.

Kara: All right my chickens, if you were born, what, like between 1960 and 1980 somewhere in there. I don't know, I mean am I middle aged? I'm 41. We are talking about midlife and middle age on the podcast today. So forget the year, it's a state of mind. If you identify, I think I've felt middle aged since I was about 12. So if you feel middle aged you are middle aged.

So we'll be talking with three of my students from the Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching, who are amazing coaches in their own right. Some of whom you may have heard on the podcast before, Jill, Karen, and Elizabeth. And I'm just going to let them introduce themselves.

And then we are going to be talking about midlife, the socialization that we get around what it means to be middle aged as a woman and how to unfuck it, because a lot of it is fucking stupid. All right, why don't we go, you want to start us off, Elizabeth, just go alphabetically?

Elizabeth: Yeah, sure. Thank you. I am so excited to be here today. So I am Elizabeth Sherman and I call myself a life and weight loss coach for women in midlife. And what I define as midlife is somewhere around 45 to

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65, but for sure the folks who I work with are women who are experiencing menopause or perimenopausal symptoms.

And I call myself a weight loss coach, but what I really do is I help my clients move away from dieting and rigid rules, and move more into listening to their own bodies. Eliminate emotional eating if they want to, or stop overeating, and create health habits that really make them feel good versus following someone else's rules.

Kara: All right, Jill, what about you?

Jill: So my name is Jill Angie and I am a running coach. And what I do is I help fat women over 40 start running. And a lot of the coaching that I do with my clients and with the folks that listen to my podcast and so forth, is help them sort of undo all of the socialization that they've had throughout their lives that thin is the best way to be.

And I kind of teach them how they can just sort of start running in the body they have right now, feel confident in the body they have right now, and just kind of say a big eff you to the patriarchy along the way.

Kara: Awesome. And Karen?

Karen: Yeah, thank you for having us. My name is Karen C.L. Anderson and I am a coach for women who want to take better care of themselves and the relationship they have with their difficult mothers. There's a lot of focus on establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries, sometimes in an effort to avoid estrangement, not always.

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And the women who I work with generally are midlife women, you know, that 45 to 65 range. And over the years that I've been doing this work I have really started to see how the difficult mother/daughter relationships don't happen in a vacuum. They happen in the context of patriarchy, and misogyny, and white supremacy and all those fun things that we like to talk about in feminist circles.

Kara: We are a fun time, feminists. So I would love to start off by just hearing from each of you what your perception of midlife was, at least before you got there or even now. Like how were we socialized to think about it before we get to how we want to disrupt all of that?

Like what are we socialized to think about women who are middle aged or midlife? Whatever that means to you, I'm sure when I was 15 I thought that 35 was middle aged and like now I'm 40. But I mean I'd just love to hear from any of you kind of what you think the stereotypes are

Elizabeth: Yeah, so I'll start. I think that when I thought of midlife when I was a younger woman, especially in my 20s, I felt like there was nothing left to happen after age 30. Like youth was where it was and that people in midlife, yeah, I kind of knew like my parents had a life before me, but I really didn't think much about it or probably give it much credit either.

And so you kind of see, or I saw people in midlife as actually not being relevant. And we'll be talking about that a little bit more today. But I think that that was whether I was buying into what society had fed me, or I really just saw that because they weren't up on pop culture, the things that I was interested in that, therefore, what did they have to contribute to the conversation?

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Kara: Do you think that that was equally gendered or more about women in midlife?

Elizabeth: Oh, good question. I think it was probably equally gendered. Although I probably had more respect for middle aged men than I did for middle aged women, yeah.

Kara: What about the rest of you?

Jill: So both of my parents were in their 40s when I was born, so they were already kind of like squarely in midlife. And all of their friends were that age as well. So it's kind of weird, I don't remember thinking about, I was just like there's me and then there's all of these old people.

And my mom and her friends, like by the time I kind of became aware of their conversations and stuff were already talking about hot flashes. And I, for a long time I was like, what are these hot flashes that everybody keeps talking about? It sounds terrible. And I didn't really understand what it was until I got older.

But yeah, I think I agree with Elizabeth. I think that like I didn't necessarily view the men as old, it was more the women. And I think it was from the way that my mom and her friends talked about themselves and they discussed aging a lot. Whereas the men were just like, yeah, like let's go. They didn't have any concerns about aging. So it did feel very, very gendered, yeah.

Karen: Conversely I had a different experience. My mom had me when she was 22, which isn't super young, given the times. But she and my dad got divorced when I was two. She married my stepfather when I was five, and

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then they got divorced when I was in college. And when I got out of college my mom was in her early 40s and was like raring to go and have fun, the fun that she didn't get to have when she was younger.

And in hindsight, I see this now as like this was not healthy. But when I got out of college I lived with my mom and we would go out to clubs and drink and meet men. And so like my view of that midlife was very different. As well, my mom had a hysterectomy when she was, gosh, in her late 20s I think. And so like the whole menopause thing really wasn't, I don't know, it just wasn't really talked about much.

So midlife, I don't know, I'm going to be 60 in a couple of months and it's like I feel like I'm beyond midlife in a way. Not really, but I don't know, it's weird. And because I've never had kids it's sort of like, I don't know, it just sort of has all sort of flowed together.

Kara: Yeah, I mean, I'd love to talk about sort of what you all began to think as you started to approach that middle age. I mean, I think for me growing up, my mother had me fairly young also, like 25. We did not do the going out to clubs part together, she had three kids. I think she had plenty of fun when she was younger it seems like. I feel like she talks about like going to Grateful Dead concerts when she was 14 in New York City. So I think she like got the fun part, she did that.

But what I hear from so many my clients, of course, is that like, and I think Jill alluded to this a little bit too, is that women are socialized to think like, there's some age beyond which they become irrelevant, right? Which I don't think men are really socialized to believe, like it's just, you know, we're relevant from when we're born until we die.

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And for women, even this idea of relevance, like that is something that comes up a lot, I find, when I'm coaching women who are in that sort of, I would say, I think people born in the last 20 or so years or 30 years don't necessarily think like 30 is that cutoff point anymore. Although I do feel like it used to be. Like if you weren't married, well, it used to be if you weren't married by 22 you're an old maid. And then if you weren't married by 30. And then, you know, I think now it's like maybe 40 more.

But this idea of like, I think the things I hear are like I feel invisible, I feel irrelevant, right? Like middle aged women are just like the people that nobody wants to hear from, you know, you don't have anything to offer. Like there's so much. I think the stereotype of like a middle aged woman is basically just like somebody who is dowdy and out of touch, right?

So I'm just curious kind of what came out for you guys as you were or approaching that age, did approach that age, move through that age, what did you see show up and you're thinking?

Elizabeth: Well, I think that men do go through a relevancy crisis as well, but I think it happens much later.

Kara: So like 80.

Elizabeth: And I've been thinking about this a lot, in fact, because I think that relevancy hinged on how we are identify ourselves. And because women are taught our most valuable asset is our looks, when we change our looks, or I shouldn't say when, our "looks fade" in midlife that's when we go through this relevancy crisis.

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Whereas men, because they are thinking about their careers and their professions they actually go through the relevancy stage when they go through retirement, for example. And so I think that men have it too, but it's for a completely different reason.

Kara: Yeah, and you can keep working in a lot of cases, whereas you cannot stop yourself from aging. But I think you're exactly right, that the whole reason this sort of like feeling of invisibility, the other side of that is feeling like the reason you're visible is that people are attracted to you. So people are either hitting on you or catcalling you.

I've coached so many women on being like, "I didn't used to like catcalling and now I miss it, because now I feel invisible because people are not sexually propositioning me on the street anymore." Because that's what women are taught visibility is, is being sexually importuned even though you don't want to be. Like that's how you know that you're visible and you matter, right?

So it's like such a place that we get all, you know, our socialization, I think, works against us because we're defining our relevance based on like do random people tell me they want to fuck me even when I'm not interested? Which is like an insane definition to be using.

Jill: I remember when I was a young girl walking down the street and my sister pointing out to my mom that all of the men on the street were like looking at me, I was 13. And I remember feeling that way when I was in my mid-20s, actually, that I wasn't getting the looks that I was getting when I was a younger woman.

Kara: Wow. Which is really, I mean that's a whole other thing.

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Jill: That's a whole other topic, yeah.

Kara: I'm 23 and I'm over the hill because men are catcalling 13 year olds on the street. It's a horrifying concept. Karen, what were you trying to say?

Karen: I was going to say that I've worked in New York City right out of college from like 1984 up through the late 90s. You know, I counted on being catcalled. Like I wanted it. And it happened and it was great. I got married relatively late, I was almost 35 when I got married. And I've been working at home ever since.

Something in this conversation that I think might be interesting to talk about is the idea of what the internet has brought to this relevance thing. Because as you were talking about it I was thinking about how I don't find my relevance so much in my looks or whether people want to fuck me, as you said, but in my work and in being visible that way. And that's way more satisfying and fulfilling.

Kara: Yeah, and it's not inherently sort of timeline, I mean, neither is sexuality because people can actually be attracted to women who are over 30. But your work is something that like you get to define and create. It's not something that is just sort of other people's opinion of you. Did you want to get in on this one?

Karen: But can you imagine, can you imagine our mothers or our grandmothers on the internet when they were our age? Or you know, younger? And they didn't have that and so it's like, anyway, I don't really know where that was going to go.

Kara: Did you want to say something, Jill? It looked like you were?

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Jill: Well, yeah, kind of I'm with you, Karen. And I think what I have found interesting, like comparing my own life in my 50s to what I remember my of mom when she was that age is how it was like there was this belief that like after you hit a certain age you need to just cut all your hair off and start dressing like super frumpy.

Kara: Oh yeah, you can't have long hair.

Jill: Yeah, right? And I'm looking at all of us, like over 40, you know, like all of us have long hair and I'm literally the only one with gray hair and it's just because last year I decided okay, I'm done.

Kara: You just can't really see mine. I have gray hair, I don't dye my hair, you just can't see it.

Jill: There you go. But I do think that part of it is the internet, for sure. Because it's kind of weird, I've always felt more connected to the generation that came, like I guess the millennial generation. Most of my girlfriends are millennials, definitely my husband is one. But I feel like I never got the message. Even though I got the message from my mom and her friends, I never really got the message.

For me personally, I feel like I never went through that process of getting married, having children, raising a family. And so I almost feel like I got the joy of sort of being an eternal teenager almost. It's kind of a weird feeling. And so now, like I hit 50 and I'm looking around and I'm like, what happened? How did I get old? Because I'm still 20 something. I'm still waiting to figure out what I want to be when I grow up. And that's been a really weird experience. I can see Elizabeth and Karen laughing.

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Kara: I think that like, because none of us on this call have children or, well, except for me. Like whatever, children you're involved with somewhat parenting. But I hear this from people who do also like, I think that there's like my grandmother when she was 90 used to say, like when I look in the mirror I'm surprised I'm not 25 anymore. Like that that's what she expected to see somehow every time.

I mean, I think everybody has this, even if they do do the more traditional like get married, have children, have the white picket fence, whatever. There's this like disconnect between your internal experience and whatever age that you're sort of feeling of yourself coalesced around and like what you see in the mirror, or what is on your birth certificate or whatever, right? And people have different points there.

But I'm also curious, and I don't know, Jill, because I know you work with fat women now, but I don't know what your history is. But I think, for me, I always felt like as somebody who was in a fat body for most of my adult life and my childhood life, like I was always kind of like, okay, well, my relevance has never come from being catcalled on the street.

That that was this actually like positive side to that was that I'm like, well I had to figure out how to like myself and feel confident and feel sexy in this body already when society was telling me not to. So I'm not that worried about aging. Like if I can do it about being fat, I can do it about having wrinkles, or gray hair. Like that's nothing, you know?

And I'm not dismissing the ageism in our society. I just mean, in terms of how hard that work was to do, I'm kind of like, okay, I know how to do that so like, fine, bring it on. Also, my fat body will be less firm and I'll have to manage my mind about it, fine.

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And I do think there's that sort of, like to me that was always one of the silver linings, was kind of like, okay, well, I've never been able to base my self-esteem on how much catcalling happens on the street. I think I'm just curious to know, Jill, what your, I don't know. I don't know your kind of whole history of body size and how you feel about that.

But I do think there's a benefit to it as you get older, of having to have done that work beforehand. As opposed to like if you fit the conventional beauty ideal and then all of a sudden you like seem to age out of that. And now this big thing you depended on for validation is now missing.

Jill: Yeah, I actually hadn't really thought of it that way. But when I was much younger, you know, one of my sister's ex-husband's friends kind of hit on me in a real creepy way when I was, I don't know, like 12 or 13. I really wasn't like, I wouldn't have considered myself a fat person until I was in college, even though while I was in high school I thought I was terribly fat with my 25 inch waist right? Fucked up. That's fucked up in and of itself.

But yeah, the catcalling and like the attention from men, I think as I gained weight in college it sort of stopped. And so then I entered the workforce and I did have a few years where I got a lot of attention from men. I gained weight, the attention stopped, and I did have to figure out okay, well then what is my self-worth based on?

And I was like, well, obviously, it's going to have to be based on my brains because, right, society doesn't like my body. It definitely took many, many years and a lot of thought work. But I think that you're right, that made it a lot easier to accept the aging process because I'd already accepted the fat.

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And I think like, last year was a big decision for me to stop coloring my hair and let all the gray come in. And I had a lot of thoughts about it, but I eventually kind of got to the place where like, all right, well, gray hair is kind of just like cellulite. It's just a circumstance, it's just a human body feature, bug, whatever you want to call it. And I'm cool with the cellulite, so I'm just going to be cool with the gray hair.

And that has been very, very freeing. But yeah, the whole male gaze thing, that has not really been my experience for the vast majority of my adult life.

Kara: I think we should also make sure we touch on the sort of ageism that happens around women, middle aged women who are in like a more traditional workforce, right? I mean, we all now do our own, like I don't have to worry about my boss discriminating against me because I'm a middle aged woman, because I am my boss. So however I'm making my own life difficult, that's not why.

There's this sort of double blind that women experience in the workforce sometimes where if they're young, they're not taken seriously because they're young and sexually attractive. And then if they're older, they're not taken seriously because they're seen as being like out of touch. And sort of middle aged women are seen as being out of touch, or not leaders, or not on the cutting edge, or not able to deal with the like whatever.

I'm curious if you guys, I mean, I know none of us are really exactly executive coaches or workplace coaches. But do you see this come up with your clients? Like how can women use thought work to kind of cope with that double bind with the stereotypes?

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Elizabeth: Yeah, so I actually do some consult work with a pharmaceutical company that's doing menopausal coaching with their employees. It's actually pretty cool. And well, I see it a lot with my clients through them, is that they have all of this stress and they're equally concerned about getting laid off and then not being able to find an appropriate job. Whereas that is true for men as well, but it seems especially true with women.

And so coaching them around the idea that, okay, so let's say that this does exist, how do you want to think about it? Or how do you want to respond? And helping them through that process.

Kara: Yeah, and it feels like it's a perfect example of a thing where there is just actual discrimination happening that we need to grapple with and that needs societal fixes. And certainly, if you go into the job process thinking, "No one will hire me because I'm old," you're going to have a harder time of it, right?

I mean, I see even just in my kind of social media life and people that I'm tangentially connected to who aren't coaches, you know, post about like, okay, I want to get my appearance touched up in this way because I have to go on the job market. So like, maybe I need to get filler, maybe I need to get this, I have to change my appearance to try to counteract ageism.

And I don't know, I think for my money, the better money there is on coaching to change the way you're thinking about this process so that you can go into it in a more confident and compelling way.

Elizabeth: Well, and I think that also what happens a lot is that women in midlife create second careers, like being coaches or like being yoga instructors or whatever. And then, because their partner is potentially

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established and they don't have to worry about finances and so they do this second career, this hobby career.

And I know that when I kind of did that because I was in the corporate world for a while and then moved into personal training and nutrition coaching. And when I did that, getting that knowing glance from other people being like, "How's your little business?" And like putting that down as kind of a, oh, this is just a stopgap measure while you still take care of your partner.

Kara: Yeah, and I think we should also obviously, that's the experience that one segment of the population is going to have, and obviously not everybody's got a partner.

Elizabeth: Yeah, that's a hetero population.

Kara: And an upper class. I mean, that's like a middle to upper class experience, right? Where you have one income that can sustain the family so somebody else can have like a hobby business or a second career.

But I think this sort of connects to something else that we talked about, which is part of the reason that women in midlife have all of these concerns or end up looking for new jobs or whatever, is because they take time out to raise their children, if they have children, right? And then they have to reenter the workforce.

I think this is an interesting group because none of us have had children by choice. I mean, all of us are childless by choice. None of us had forced children, that didn't sound right. Childless by choice. And I think both Karen and Jill have alluded to this weird feeling of like, is this midlife? I don't

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know, there's no, like I don't have this marker of like, well, my children are going off to college and now I'm an empty nester. So I'd love to hear more about kind of that thought process. Yeah, Karen.

Karen: Well, I do have three step kids and I don't know if that matters. I think it does matter because my stepchildren are all adults and two of them have children of their own. And so I am a grandmother and I've had to coach myself a lot around this and get coached on it, actually. Because it's like, well I don't really want to be a grandmother. But for the longest time, I thought that I'm supposed to want that.

And I am that and I've learned how to just be Karen or Boo-boo as they call me, and not have it be like the stereotype.

Kara: That's interesting.

Karen: But a few years ago, I want to say it was around 2018, I really started to see and catch myself in how I was people pleasing, especially my stepdaughter. And how that was it was coming from this place of like, oh, I'm supposed to be this kind of woman, or this kind of grandmother. And I'm like I didn't want to be that kind of person. I don't like taking care of people, that's just the way it is.

And it's like once I owned that, it's like I could then show up with them as myself and they get the best of me. And so it's much better. But like unpeeling that people pleasing thing, which all of us have been socialized to do, right? And to take care of others. Dissecting that for myself was super helpful.

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Kara: I feel like if there's an identity that's really stereotyped, it's the grandmother. It's like not even, I mean one of the things that we talked about before this episode, and that we should talk about now is that there's like the competing stereotypes of midlife. Like you're either frumpy or you're like a sexually rapacious cougar.

But if you're a grandma you only get one option. There's only one stereotype, which is to be like motherly and make cookies, and, you know, whatever it is.

Karen: I mean I know some women out there, there's a woman I know who calls herself Glam-ma.

Kara: Oh, I think I've seen her Instagram.

Karen: But yeah, none of it, I don't know. Again, it's like at the time when my grandson was born, he's 11 now. And I got to witness his birth and that was one of the, I think it was probably the number one most powerful experience of my life, was watching him be born.

But I remember feeling this sort of internal like, okay, I have to define myself. I have to find my grandmother niche, you know? And I didn't have to.

Kara: That's so important, because that's part of what we're talking about here, right? Is that, as with everything, women are given like two completely contradictory options, right? You can be like a virgin or a whore, you can be like a homemaker or an executive, you can be a cougar or you can be a frumpy out of touch whatever, right? Or you can be like sexually a girl or your post menopause and who cares, you're never having sex again.

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There's all of these stereotypes that don't reflect the actual lived reality of women's lives, of course, which is much more complex and subtle.

Karen: And there are so many different ways to be a grandmother or a woman in a child's life. I mean, there's just so many, I think that's the thing when we're sort of conceiving this whole idea, was that it is so much more than just this or that.

Kara: Yeah. So I'm curious, obviously we're trying to cover a lot, but one of the other big tensions that women in midlife often experience that you guys talked about in your kind of submission was that sandwich generation, right? Of like I'm taking care of children and I'm taking care of older parents.

And that's sort of the ways in which women are socially kind of constrained to be the caretakers, be the nurturers, et cetera. And I'm sort of curious how you see that kind of like coming up in your clientele potentially, and how you think coaching can help people who are in that situation and are kind of feeling drained and pulled in so many different directions?

Jill: Yeah, I mean, it definitely comes up for my clientele. I mean it's not an experience I've had, obviously. But so many of the women that come to me, they're actually coming to me to learn how to start running so that they can carve out just a tiny little bit of space for themselves between kids who are not quite old enough to leave the nest and taking care of aging parents.

I think they feel like they actually have to do all the things. And, of course, take care of the spouse as well. And I think they end up feeling pretty trapped. And so, yeah, it's definitely a big issue, at least for women in the population that I coach, for sure.

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Kara: And how do you think coaching can kind of help them move through that?

Jill: Yeah, I think it's like, first of all, unpacking the stereotype of like okay, I'm the woman, I'm the mom, so I have to take care of everybody. And recognizing that a lot of that is socialization. And especially when you have teenage kids, they're pretty self-sufficient.

Kara: You're like they were taking ships to America by themselves a hundred years ago, they're fine.

Jill: They're fine, right? And then also, and I think, Karen, you probably see a ton of this, is I need to take care of my parents but also I have this really fraught relationship with my mom, or with maybe both of my parents.

And so, yeah, I think thought work can help defuse some of those thoughts about my parent not respecting me. Karen is probably better to speak to that. But coaching is like super powerful in that way. I'm not elucidating this very well.

Kara: I think it's, I mean I think that coaching can help women deprogram that caretaking thing, right?

Jill: Yeah. Thank you, yes.

Kara: That goes also to the phases of life. It's like, okay, when you're young your value is sexual. And then when you're middle age now, right, it's like the archetypes of like the virgin, or the new wife, whatever. And then the mother and then now your value is taking care of everybody. Certainly

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nobody wants to fuck you anymore, so now you got to take care of everybody.

Especially if you have stepped off the career escalator to raise your children, or you are no longer like at a job where you base your value on. I think part of what coaching can do is help people decondition some of that programming that they have to kind of justify their existence. Especially for the kind of subgroup of women with economic privilege who have stopped working or who are working less or whatever, with their spouse the breadwinner.

I think women in that situation, which again, is obviously not everybody, have even more of that like, well I'm not bringing home the money so I have to take care of everything and I have to take care of everyone and that's how I'm valuable or worthwhile or like allowed to exist.

Karen: I do work with a lot of women who have elderly mothers who they don't like, or in some cases hate. And the guilt that they feel, the common, the very typical they present with is either I do everything for her and feel resentful. Or I do nothing or I have my boundaries and I feel guilt. Like that's the resentment, guilt, resentment, guilt, which one do I choose? Those are those are my only two choices.

And for a long time I would coach people around that in terms of thoughts. And I've come to a place where I teach sometimes, depending on the person, if the choice is between guilt and resentment, choose guilt.

And just being able to be with yourself when you feel guilt, right? And to recognize that the Earth isn't going to swallow you, you know, open up and swallow you whole if you feel guilty. It's like it doesn't prove anything about

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you that you feel guilt. Whereas on the other hand, resentment can really fuck with you.

And ultimately, even when a mother or a woman maybe doesn't really love her mother all that much, or doesn't really care about her mother, but feels this obligation to care for her. She doesn't want to be mean to her mother, but she doesn't include herself in the kindness that she extends, if that makes sense.

And so my coaching in that is always, and it's all about boundaries, but is in including yourself in whatever it is you're extending to the other person, if that makes sense. Because the resentment will have them not showing up in a way that they don't like or respect.

Kara: Right.

Karen: So it's more for them than it is their mothers, but it works for both.

Kara: Yeah, I think that's a great point. Elizabeth, you wanted to get in here also?

Elizabeth: Yeah, well what I was going to say is actually exactly what Karen was saying, which is what I do a lot with my coaching is help my clients renegotiate boundaries because they've spent so much of their life taking care of their partner, taking care of the kids, doing for all these other people, and then having the expectation that they're also going to be taking care of their parent, right?

And so they're getting squished from all sides. And they are so deathly afraid of saying no, that I can't do this. You know, Jill said teenagers are

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very self-sustaining, I had a client who was making freakin four dinners for her partner and her two kids and herself. And I was like, why are you doing that? And it was because, well they need me to do it. I was like, no, they don't.

But she was so afraid of doing for herself and setting up that boundary, that they wouldn't love her anymore, or that she wouldn't be relevant to them or needed to them anymore.

Kara: Right? Because that's what women are socialized to believe their value is in like being needed in that way, right?

Elizabeth: Yeah, absolutely. And so like when we can create those boundaries and do it from a place of self-love, and then we can actually take care of ourselves in the process.

And so I think that a lot of midlife is really renegotiating our relationships that we have with ourselves, with our partner, with our children, with our parents, all of that because we're growing into this different version of ourselves.

Kara: Yeah, I mean, I think what's coming to mind for me is, I think this sort of works to bring it all together. But it's that like one of the biggest mistakes we are always making, right, is that we think our circumstances cause our thoughts. So it's like, well because I have elderly parents, because I have kids, because I have whatever, I have to be this way, this is how it has to be. They need me to act the way I'm acting, right? Like that's what's causing it.

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And this is making me reflect on the fact that one of the reasons that I chose not to have children was that when I imagined taking care of children, I imagined having to be this like completely different person who was like selfless and who was doing everything for them, et cetera, et cetera.

And then I ended up in a situation where I partnered with somebody who has children and I, you know, I'm not their step parent, but I'm like, I don't know, involved. I'm around them and I'm participating, and they're young enough so you can't really spend a lot of time with them and not be parenting to some degree, you know, when it's happening.

And as we're having the conversation I'm realizing like, oh, but actually, that's not how it's turned out because I'm me, and I have my own way of being. That's how I'm showing up as a parent too, right? Because I didn't come into this with this idea of like, oh, I'm picking this role and I have to be this role and that's where my worth and value comes from.

So I don't know if this is making sense, but it's sort of like I think we always blame it on the role, when in fact of course, it's our thoughts about like how we're supposed to be that or perform that. And that as it's turned out, since I just started experiencing part of this I'm just still me. Like I talk to kids the way that I talk, you know, it's a little different. But it's not like I have transformed into some totally different person or need to in order to still have a like even caretaking relationship.

So I feel like that's just sort of such a good example of how there's actually a million ways to have these relationships to take care of a parent, to take care of your kids, to be a woman in midlife to whatever it is. And it's not caused by the circumstances. It all is your behavior is flowing from your

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conceptualization of the role, the time in your life, whatever it is, right? Like you can make it whatever you want.

I feel like that was a good, like that kind of wrapped it up. Why don't you all tell people where they can find you if they want to learn more? We have three very different niches here on this podcast, so we've got like something for everybody.

You want to just go alphabetically again? Elizabeth, you want to start?

Elizabeth: Sure you can find me on the interwebs at elizabethsherman.com.

Kara: That was a very midlife thing to say, Elizabeth, the interwebs.

Elizabeth: Oh, did I just date myself? Shit. I also host a podcast called *Done With Dieting*. Come find me on Instagram at [esherman68](https://www.instagram.com/esherman68), and Total Health by Eliz on Facebook. I need to like combine those altogether.

Kara: Yeah, we need some standardization there, yeah.

Elizabeth: I know, someone is cringing right now.

Jill: So yeah, you can find me on Instagram at Not Your Average Runner. You can find me at notyouraveragerunner.com. You can find my podcast, also called creatively, *Not Your Average Runner*. And on Facebook as Not Your Average Runner.

Kara: Got good brand cohesion across the way.

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Jill: It's pretty consistent, yeah.

Kara: What about you, Karen?

Karen: Yeah, I'm pretty consistent as well. My website is kclanderson.com. All the social media is KCL Anderson. I just hopped on the TikTok bandwagon.

Kara: You hopped on the TikTok.

Karen: I hopped on the TikTok and I'm actually having a lot of fun doing these fun little videos, which leads into my podcast. Which you can find in all the places and it's called *Dear Adult Daughter*.

Kara: Love it. And if you're listening to this, I was about to say if you're in midlife, but I actually feel like at any stage if you want a concrete takeaway, it's like go write down all your thoughts about what it means to be middle aged or to be in midlife. And if you're in that phase of your life, especially, like what are all the beliefs you have about this stage of your life and what it has to be like or what it means to be a middle aged woman? And start working through those.

If you're in the Clutch bring them to ask the coaches or the Facebook group or your one to one coach. If you're doing this solo, use the tools you learn in this podcast. But don't let a certain time in your life define for you what your life is supposed to look like. All right, thank you, my friends, my chickens. I'll talk to you next week.

Okay y'all, how amazing were those women? And how incredible was that conversation? If you recognized yourself in the thought patterns that we

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talked about and things came up for you that you want to work on, make sure you are on the wait list for the Clutch. Text your email to +1 347 934 8861. That's +1 347 934 8861 and you will get put on the wait list. Or go to unfuckyourbrain.com/clutch.

The Clutch is my monthly feminist coaching community and program. And that is where you learn how to actually recognize the ways that what you were taught by society are impacting you and how to rewire your brain so that you can believe something different. And so that no matter how much life you have left, which none of us truly knows how long we'll be here, you can live out loud on purpose with intention and to the fullest. Because that's really all that we can do with our one wild and precious life, as Mary Oliver says. I'll see you guys there.