

**UFYB 263: Agonizing Over Decisions and Preparing  
for Unhelpful Thoughts:  
Takeaways from Clutch College**



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

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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. How are you? I am, how am I? I didn't prepare, I didn't prepare for asking myself how I am. I'm good. I am well. I think I'm well. I'm recording this during the weekend that is daylight savings time. So I have a lot of thoughts and feelings about daylight savings time but other than that I am doing well. We just finished our Claim Your Authority Challenge which was really exciting and powerful. And I am just really blown away by how I think core and central this authority work is to everything that I have been teaching and coaching on.

I feel like it's all coming together in a different way now, at a different level, which is really exciting. And I'm about to go to the West Coast for a week. I'm going to go see my coaching bestie, and one of my friends from high school. I have a lot of my loved ones are in the Bay area. So I'm going to go see some of them and the Gentleman Consort and I are going to go to stay in a house in the Redwoods in Marin for a few days for his birthday.

And then I am going to go to Vegas of all places which is really not my town for a mastermind meeting with my colleagues and friends. So I would not go to Vegas for anybody else other than my mastermind. But these are the women who keep me sane and help me blow my own mind on the regular. So I'm going to Vegas for that and then I'll be back. It's going to be a whirlwind week, I'm excited.

I've realized recently that I always tease the Gentleman Consort because he needs to see stranger faces every day. He feels this visceral need for a lot of variety in the humans that he sees. And I don't feel that way at all. I

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could stay home for two weeks and be perfectly happy but I do like variety, of my living space is what I've realized. I think that's part of why I like to travel is sure, it's about seeing other places but it's also kind of just about seeing other houses.

So that makes me feel like maybe instead of buying a house I just want to rent different places for a year at a time and live in different neighborhoods and different styles. So that's what I've been musing on. What do you like variety in and why? That's not what we're talking about today but I'm just sharing with you what's been on my mind today.

Okay, here's what we're doing today. A few weeks ago we wrapped up Clutch College Live. It was the last Clutch College Live of 2022. That's what year it is, right? Yes, 2022. And we are not currently planning a Clutch College Live for 2023. So it was our last one for a while. And one of the things I love to do is share some of the biggest takeaways from Clutch College weekends with all of you so that everyone can learn what we do after Clutch College, as we post in our Clutch Facebook group.

And lots of people weigh in there and share their takeaways, so that the whole group can benefit, even people who aren't able to attend or can't invest at that level. And then I like to take just a couple of those and share them with you, with the public. So that way all of the wisdom trickles down. So here is one of the kind of big things that I think came out of this weekend. And was the idea that there is no hierarchy in thoughts and feelings.

Sometimes I don't even like using the term, negative emotion because I feel like it, I mean it just basically communicates that there are positive and negative emotions. And that makes people kind of – it reinforces this idea that negative emotion is bad, or unpleasant, or something to get out of. And

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that positive emotion is good and what we should want to have. But those are optional ways of thinking about emotions, those aren't inherently true. And we all can think of a time that we've had a 'negative emotion' that has felt good in some way.

Sometimes it can feel good to feel sad and have a cry about something when you want to grieve it or miss it. And sometimes feeling excited about something positive can feel very close to anxiety because the physiological symptoms in your body are very similar. It's just the sort of frame you're putting on it and the story you tell yourself about it that's different. So I don't really love that whole negative positive emotion dichotomy. I use it because so many other people use it and most of my listeners and students use it.

And it's useful to try to help people understand why they are reacting in a certain way to certain emotions. But fundamentally there is no hierarchy of emotions and no hierarchy of thoughts which means there aren't some thoughts that are objectively better than others. And I think that because we talk about trying to believe thoughts that are more useful to us or more self-compassionate. And in The Clutch we talk a lot about the thought ladder which I also have talked about on the podcast where you put a goal thought that you want to get to, at the top and you practice thoughts to help you get there.

We can kind of unconsciously start to believe that the goal thought is the better thought or the thought we don't yet believe or can't yet believe is the better thought. And that when we finally get there then we're going to be happy forever. A human ability to take anything we don't have or any place we aren't and attach finally pure happiness will be there to that thing is unbelievable. It's our strongest human skill but that's not how the brain works because life is 50/50.

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So there's nothing inherently better about certain thoughts than others in some kind of objective or moral sense. And you're not a better person, or a better at thought work, or worse at thought work based on whether you're thinking them or not. If you have a goal thought that you want to learn to believe, when you get there it's awesome to give yourself a high five and celebrate that accomplishment. But it's not like you've now arrived and that's better than where you were.

And even if you get to a thought that you didn't think you could believe before and it's super cool that you got there and you can celebrate that. And you may find, now I can see where the next thought I want to get to is and life will still be 50/50 when I get there too. So there's no hierarchy of thoughts and it's not better or worse to be at the top of the thought ladder or the bottom of the thought ladder. And there's no hierarchy of emotions either. Some emotions are not better than others. No feeling is better or worse than another.

And we have such stories about different feelings that we don't want to feel anxiety because it feels bad, or we don't want to feel jealousy because that makes us a bad person. And we don't want to feel anger because we tell ourselves anger isn't useful. We don't want to feel this emotion because that's not healthy. We have all these stories about our emotions but there's no hierarchy of emotion. No emotions are better or worse than others. They're not morally better or worse. They're not better or worse in a utilitarian sense.

They're just feelings, they're just physical states in your body. That would be like saying that thirst is morally better than hunger or having to pee is morally better than having to sneeze, just different physical sensations in your body. It's just the story you give them that makes a difference. So if you can release that sort of hierarchy belief, it's going to really free you up

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to just experience whatever's coming up in your mind, and in your body, in your thoughts, in your feelings without the sort of meta narrative about it.

And so understanding the lack of a hierarchy, the equality of all thoughts and feelings will sort of take you out of this practice that we get into of evaluating and judging our own thought work and our own emotional life. Another of the kind of big takeaways that I think from Clutch College that I taught was that we tend to make it really complicated for ourselves when we are sort of sabotaging ourselves, or not making a decision, or not trying, not taking a risk, not doing something that we think we want to do. And I think that we tend to kind of mystify this and make it feel kind of complicated in some mysterious psychological way.

And so often I see people share that that Marianne Williamson quote that's like that we are not afraid of our limitations, we are afraid of our own greatness or whatever it is. We're afraid that we're great beyond measure. It's a Marianne Williamson quote that weirdly gets attributed to Nelson Mandela. It's not Nelson Mandela, it's Marianne Williamson. So I don't think that that's true personally. I mean I do think that some of us have a fear about being big, and being great, and being seen. It's not that that's not sometimes the case.

But generally what we're afraid of is just the mean shit that we're going to say to ourselves. But we'd like to make it mysterious. I coached somebody at Clutch College who was afraid to leave a marriage. And I coached somebody at Clutch College who was afraid to start their business and on and on, whatever these versions of things we're afraid to do are. And when we tell ourselves, well, I think maybe I'm just afraid of my own greatness then we don't know what to do.

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But actually when you coach someone like that and you coach through it, what it turns out is I don't want to start my business because I'm afraid I'll fail and then I'll tell myself I can't succeed as an entrepreneur. I don't want to leave my marriage because I'm afraid that if I do at some point I'm going to feel bad and then I'm going to tell myself I shouldn't have left my marriage and I made a mistake. We're actually just afraid of the mean shit that we're going to say to ourself later.

So if there's anything in your life that you're having trouble making a decision, you're having trouble following through on a decision, you're having trouble taking action. Don't make it mystical or confusing to yourself. Just ask yourself what you're afraid you will feel and what will you be thinking that will cause that feeling. That's all you're afraid of. And my experience is that it is 98% of the time you are just afraid of the mean shit you're going to say to yourself.

And so we will stay stagnant in our lives for years to avoid our unmanaged mind saying something mean to ourselves, when in fact we have to be the ones to take control of that and decide ahead of time what to think instead. And that kind of leads, I think, to the third big takeaway from Clutch College I want to share which is that when we are stuck in that decision making kind of paralysis it's because we want to try to think our way to a plan that will guarantee that we'll have the thoughts and feelings that we want.

And what I said and taught at Clutch College is that there are no actions that you can figure out that will give you a money back guarantee that you will only have thoughts and feelings you want to have in the future. You cannot come up with a set of actions that will pre buy into your future mind to be nice to you. That's what we do though, because we think that our thoughts and feelings are determined by our actions and our circumstances.

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So if I'm agonizing about whether to leave a relationship I think about it over, and over, and over again all different ways looking for the decision and the rationale that I can believe right now is so true, that I can trust that my future brain will never have a regretful thought about it. But there's no such thing, there's no set of actions that you can brainstorm now that will control your future brain.

It's like we want to find something that would be a legally binding contract so our future brain won't be mean to us, or won't say that it regrets it, or won't say we made a mistake and that's not possible. And that's why we get stuck thinking over and over trying to manipulate situations, trying to come up with a different solution, circling around and around. We're waiting to feel certain that our brain will not say some shit to us in the future. But a 100% your brain is going to.

Have you met your brain? It's definitely going to say some shit. And so what you need to do is decide on purpose ahead of time what you are going to say when your brain does that. So yeah, I'm going to decide to leave this relationship or stay, whatever the decision is. And when my brain says x, y, z in the future, here's how I'm going to respond to myself. And here's what I'm going to practice thinking now to decrease the possibility that my brain just offers me some mean thoughts in the future and I believe them.

So if you are agonizing over any kind of decision, we talked about this so much in the Claim Your Authority Challenge too. There is no solution you can get to that will ensure that your brain won't say some mean shit in the future. The only thing you can do is practice ahead of time what you want to believe in the future. And plan to be nice to yourself if your brain does say some dumb shit anyway. That's the part you can control is managing your own mind.



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And that kind of leads me to the last takeaway I want to share. A lot of this was kind of around goals and goals setting. That because we're so afraid of what our brain is going to say, we actually just refrain from setting goals at all. So we don't set goals so that we won't feel bad if we don't achieve it. Or I'm not going to set a goal to sell a painting for \$1,000 because I don't want to feel bad if that doesn't happen. Meanwhile you are already making a decision that makes it guaranteed it won't happen. So the circumstance and the result you're producing are the same, no painting sold.

But because you're doing it to yourself and not even trying you somehow believe that that will feel better than trying and failing. So you're already not trying. You are already not achieving it. You already feel bad because you beat yourself up for not trying. So you're already not trying and you're already not managing your mind. If you decide to try and decide to manage your mind, you might actually get to achieve it. And even if you don't you will still be able to manage your mind better than you are now.

So this thing we do where we avoid setting goals and we avoid going after what we want, so that we won't feel bad if we don't achieve it makes no sense because when we do that we're already not achieving it. We're like, "I don't want to feel bad if I don't sell a painting so I won't try." So you're already not selling a painting. And in fact you're not selling a painting in a way where the only possible outcome is to continue not selling a painting. If you actually try to sell a painting, the potential upside is you actually do it.

And the only downside is you think you'll be meaner to yourself if you try and fail than if you don't try at all and that's what's completely backwards. Our unmanaged mind will be meaner to us if we try and fail than if we don't try at all. So we have to decide, I'm going to be nice to myself if I try and fail. So it is more worth it to me to try and fail. I'm going to decide on purpose what to think about that. Your goals don't cause your feelings, not

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setting a goal doesn't cause a feeling and setting a goal doesn't cause a feeling.

And achieving a goal doesn't cause a feeling and failing to achieve a goal doesn't cause a feeling. Nothing, your goals don't cause your feelings whether they exist or not, whether you reach them or not. What causes your feelings is your thoughts about the goal and about your 'success or failure'. So rather than tell yourself, I'm going to be mean to myself if I try so I just won't try. And by the way I'll be mean to myself about not trying also. So I'm going to be mean to myself either way.

You can decide, I'm willing to try and I am going to be nice to myself along the way. And that is what is going to change my experience whether I achieve the goal or not. And that's all you're looking for anyway is belief in yourself and positive self-regard whether or not you achieve the goal at all. Alright my chickens, those are the takeaways or a few of the many takeaways from this year's Clutch College. And I hope that they're helpful as you go out and manage your mind this week. I'll talk to you next week.

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It's where you can learn new coaching tools not shared on the podcast that will blow your mind even more. And it's where you can hang out and connect over all things thought work with other podcast chickens just like you and me. It's my favorite place on earth and it will change your life, I guarantee it. Come join us at [www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch](http://www.unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch). That's [unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch](http://unfuckyourbrain.com/theclutch). I can't wait to see you there.