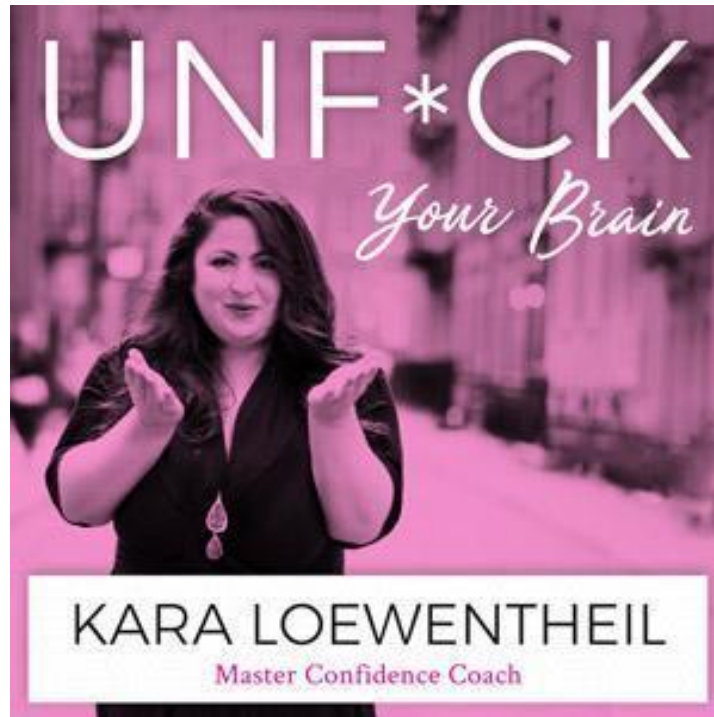


UFYB 289: Loving v. Being Loved and Which Feels Better



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *UnF*ck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And now here's your host, Harvard Law School grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello my chickens. How are you? I am having the human experience I tell what. Are you having the human experience too? You probably are. But the good thing about the human experience is that there's usually insight and growth on the other side of it. I mean there's not really another side to the human experience overall other than death. But I just mean when we are really in it, when it is not going the way we want and we are having a lot of thoughts and feelings.

If we are willing to stay present and curious then I think there is usually some learning on the other side of that, even if it's just kind of learning about how we respond to the world which is some of the most important learning there is I think. So last week I was in New Orleans for my birthday and I was thinking about the past couple of years as I think is common on a birthday. So I turned 42 this year which I'm almost positive is correct. I keep having to do the math. Yes, that's right.

And for me my 40th birthday was a really significant experience and then 41 and 42 have been kind of fine, but 40 was a really breakthrough year for me especially around love and how I was thinking about my dating life and love and being partnered. And I have talked about this on the podcast before but I'm going to kind of retell the story briefly because it's kind of important to this episode that I had a big breakthrough right around that birthday which was that I had been using thought work and working with coaches on my kind of dating mindset for a while.

And then I had done some intensive work with coaches that year and was still working with them. And the year I was turning 40, so that was 2021. Vaccines for COVID had just become available and sort of a lot was going

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on. We had a birthday party for me. I rented a hotel kind of penthouse that had an outdoor area because this was still very early in the vaccination process. And I had a party with just my family and a couple of very close friends. Everybody had gotten vaccinated. This was the first thing that anybody had been to that was social really, we were outside.

And I also was going through the beginning of one relationship and the end of another. So there were just a lot of transitions happening. I actually had met my partner, the gentleman consort a month earlier but things were not at all serious at that point or not for me yet. I think he was already having serious feelings, but in my mind it was still, he's just separated and getting divorced and has two kids and this is not a serious thing. And meanwhile I had been seeing somebody longer who wasn't going to be a life partner but I just had been seeing for a longer time and had more of an emotional kind of investment with.

And so the plan for my birthday had been, have this party with my friends and family and then have a night in a hotel with my kind of, the person that I really had been seeing. And about three weeks before my birthday, right around the same weekend of the gentleman consort or the next week, that the guy had broken things off. And so my story about myself and my dating life was a little misguided. And I kept thinking that what I needed to do for my birthday was to be alone.

So my story which was wrong, which I'll get to, was that I had been too invested in wanting to spend my birthday with somebody I was dating, that I had this whole story about that. And that what the universe was telling me or what I was supposed to put together or what I had decided was that I needed to go spend my birthday upstate alone, to get even better at being alone. So I went to try to do that and instead what happened is actually my dating coaches who I have become friends with also lived in upstate New York.

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And they were like, “Well, we made you a cake, let us at least drop it off.” And then another friend of mine also lives upstate and was like, “Well, let me come by and take you to lunch or dinner.” And then my mother actually had organized this video from this service called Tribute where different people can record little greetings or videos for you and then you can watch them. And so I basically was sort of forced to watch literally 20 minutes of everybody important in my life pretty much talking about how much they loved me and why.

And I really had one of those, like so often thought work and self-development and growth are not big breakthrough moments with swelling music in the background. So often they're just the steady grind of changing your thoughts, but occasionally you do get a big breakthrough. And I really had a moment during that weekend, watching that video where I thought, oh my God, there's so much love in my life and I'm so supported and I am so fixated on this one specific kind of love as if that's going to make all the difference.

It's like I have 10 varieties of apple and I'm telling myself that I have to have this 11th variety of apple to be happy because none of these other apples can satiate the apple desire, that don't count. And so that was this really big breakthrough for me of there's so much love in my life. Adding a partner would just be adding a little bit more love. It's make or break. It's not a block away difference. It's not zero to infinity or zero to 100. It's just adding a little bit more. And that the actual answer for me was not that I needed to be even better at being alone because I was actually quite good at being alone.

But that I needed to let in and appreciate all the love that was already around me and being offered to me. And that breakthrough kind of allowed me to show up in a different way and build this relationship that I have with my partner now. So that's just the prelude to this story. And so that relationship I have now is a beautiful, wonderful thing and also it has not

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solved my experience of being a human which I find is very rude because definitely society told me that it would.

So on this birthday I was sitting on the porch of our hotel in New Orleans, definitely when I imagined that partner that was going to change my whole life. I did not think that I would get up two hours earlier than he would and that he would snore and so I would need to go sit somewhere else to drink my coffee. You don't imagine these things when you're having a patriarchal fantasy. So anyway, but I was thinking about the two years since that 40th birthday and how much has changed. My whole life has changed. I moved to Brooklyn and now I co-parent children half the week.

And I'm very settled in one specific place, a lot of things have changed. But I was just thinking about kind of what I had imagined having a sort of life partner would be like versus what my experience of it is. And I've often thought along the way that my partner seems to be more having the experience that I think that I thought I would have. I should preface this by saying, nobody is blissful in love all the time. I get on his nerves. He sometimes get annoyed. I have plenty of flaws and quirks.

But in general he sort of feels this very active kind of blissful sense of being very unloved a lot of the time. That's how he would describe it. And that is not a thing that my brain has been producing. And I really wondered, is that just not a feeling I'm capable of feeling? What is different? I've been turning this over in my mind, sort of do we just experience emotions differently? Is it because I did so much work on kind of validation? I used to get very high on validation when I was infatuated with somebody, is that what's different?

Here's what I realized on that porch that really blew my fucking mind. I have been thinking about it and thinking about it to figure out how to teach it. And it's one of these things that I think once I say it, it's going to, even as I said it to myself, it both seemed obvious in some ways, even something

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I'd heard before. But then at the same moment it hit me like a ton of bricks in a way that I was like, "Oh, I did not get that before."

So I think this is kind of critical, whether you're in a relationship where you don't feel whatever bliss you expected to feel or whether you're single and you're trying to pick partners based on how you feel around them. This is important to you either way. So as a coach, this is a little bit meta, just stay with me. As a coach, I was a coach by the time I met my partner, I had been for quite a while professionally. I obviously knew that I was not going to be able to feel my partner's love, that somebody else loving me was not going to make me feel loved.

So I understood that, I was not expecting that. I understood it was my own thoughts would create my feelings. But what I have realized now is that women are so socialized to see themselves as the objects of desire or love. And we're so socialized to believe that being chosen and loved by someone, especially a man is the thing that will make us feel complete. So I knew that his love for me wouldn't create my feelings. And I knew these sort of conceptual facts about how women are socialized. But I did not realize that I was still subconsciously focused on being the object of love in this relationship.

So whenever I was focusing on my thoughts or thinking about my thoughts in the context of this relationship I was thinking about how he shows his love for me. I wasn't expecting his actions or his feelings to cause my feelings directly. I knew that it would be my own thoughts about his actions or feelings that could cause my feelings. But I was still very focused on thinking about how he showed up in the relationship.

So if my brain was doing its usual critical thing and finding fault when I wanted to try to change that experience I would try to redirect it by thinking about how lucky I am that I have a partner who writes me love notes or is always happy to see me. Or will always get up and get me a glass of water

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when I ask for one or whatever the ways that he shows his love big and small. I was always focusing on ways he acts towards me and then trying to think thoughts about them that were positive.

So it was just kind of a meta level of thinking that his actions and how he shows up as a partner is what would determine my happiness. I was adding this layer of knowing it was my thoughts about those things but I was still focused on those things. I was still seeing him through, it's sort of this instrumental lens, what was important was what he did for me or how he performed as a partner. And as though the way to be happy or feel in love would be to focus on how he was performing as a partner.

As if my thoughts about that are what should make me blissfully happy but they never did. And I know enough to not expect to be blissful all the time but occasional bliss I feel like is reasonable to want. And so here's what I realized when I was sitting on that balcony. When my partner does feel that way, when he feels a sweeping sense of love it's because he is thinking thoughts about loving me. His thoughts, this is based on what he has articulated to me. I'm not a mind reader, this is what he has talked about to me.

His thoughts are about me, the good traits he sees in me, how lucky he feels to have found someone like me. I'm sure he does also think about how I show up in our relationship and he values that. But at bottom line, his happy feelings are because he is thinking about his love for me. And my feelings are because I'm also thinking about his love for me. Both of us are thinking about me. And he is feeling amazing because he is thinking positive thoughts about me and how happy he is to be with me.

And I am not feeling as amazing because I'm also thinking about how he is being with me. What I'm not doing or I wasn't doing was thinking about him. I wanted being loved or my thoughts about being loved to create my feelings and to create sort of the feeling of being in love. This is what's so

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fucked up about the socialization. I even knew that being loved wouldn't cause my feelings.

But when I was trying to work with my thoughts to create more positivity around it or to sort of figure out why I wasn't sort of feeling a certain way, I was still thinking thoughts about being loved, about myself as an object of love. Or about how somebody else was acting in loving me. It was still completely centered on myself. He was thinking about me and how much he loved me. And I was thinking about how he loved me. Do you see the difference?

What I was not doing was thinking about him outside of his performance as my partner. I was not appreciating him for the multi-dimensional person he was or at least not consistently enough. I wasn't focusing my thinking on that. And this is so insidious, the way our socialization shows up. Women are socialized to believe that being chosen for a romantic relationship by a man is the thing that most validates them and will make them happiest.

So then in turn we evaluate the quality of our romantic relationship and particularly if we're dating men I think, how a man shows up as a romantic partner as an extension of our worth because we've been taught to do that. To see it, you can just think about it reversed. Men are not taught that how romantic a woman is in her actions towards them, tells them something about their worth or value or happiness. Men are not sitting around talking about how their partner doesn't do romantic things and that just makes them feel insecure and they're not really worthy of love.

Men are socialized to think that how conventionally sexually attractive a woman is reflects on their value as a man. And in some more conventional circles or traditional circles, maybe they're socialized to believe that how fertile a woman is, or what kind of homemaker she is reflects on them. They get socialization about how their partner reflects on them but it's just different. And men are taught that if the partner doesn't live up to that

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socialization, if she stops being conventionally sexually attractive, if she's not a good homemaker or whatever, that the partner is the problem.

It's like she did it wrong or she's no longer somebody that reflects on my masculinity positively. Whereas women are taught we're the problem, that if a man is not showing up in a certain way, it's because there's something wrong with us. He doesn't love us enough. If we were good enough, if we were lovable enough then our partner would be romantic or would write us love letters or would do a big gesture or would whisk us off to Paris or whatever.

So women are taught that how kind of romantic or loving their partner is reflects on their value and lovability. And that that's what will make you feel amazing when you're in a relationship. So that means that some of us are still waiting and wanting to feel amazing based on how someone else is acting. And the socialization is so deep that even if we know about thought work, we still like I was, maybe unconsciously focusing our thought work on our thoughts about how someone else is showing up as our partner.

It's still this way in which what I was trying to feel good about was having new thoughts and more positive thoughts. Where sort of I already think that my partner shows up in an amazing way as a partner. But I kept trying to tell myself that as a way to create a feeling of love for him, but that's instrumental. I can't love him just because he does things that our society tells us a romantic partner should do.

That was not actually creating the connection, the love, the occasional bliss that I want to feel about my romantic relationship because it was still focused in a weird way on myself as the object and on evaluating everything through the lens of how is this person performing in this instrumental way towards me. I was trying to create happiness by thinking positive thoughts about how my partner shows up in a relationship doing all the things that society taught me would prove I won the romantic jackpot.

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But that shit is a lie. You will not feel blissful love even if you win the jackpot in terms of a partner who does all those things for you or shows up that way because to feel blissfully in love you have to be thinking blissful thoughts about the other person. The feeling of love is something we have to create, not by thinking about how someone else validates us or performs in relationship with us but by thinking about the most lovable being for their own sake. Thinking about the traits and the attributes and the characteristics we love about them.

Obviously some of this does and can overlap with how they show up for us. I'm not saying there's something wrong with one of the reasons you love someone being that they're really supportive. Or they consistently prioritize making space for you in their lives or, of course, that can be part of it. But we can't just entirely focus on their performance at a socially constructed role that we are using to validate ourselves. Their performance in that role is not going to create the feeling of love that we want. And even our thoughts aren't going to create the feeling of love that we want because it's fundamentally still about us.

My partner when he feels blissful about me it's because he's focusing on his love for me. That's what feels good to him. I'm not feeling amazing because I am not focusing on my love for him as a person. I am focusing on what it's like and thoughts about being loved. I'm still subconsciously expecting being loved to be the thing that makes the difference because that's what I was socialized to believe. I was not taught growing up that the way to feel amazing is to love my partner amazingly.

I was taught the way to feel amazing is to be chosen and loved by my partner in a way that fulfills a societal norm. That means I won and I'm good enough. That shit does not work. So I think that this realization, I have not even really been doing a lot of very targeted thought work about it yet. But I already see how it's shifting my focus into a much more holistic full spectrum view of my partner and how much easier it is to access those

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amazing love feelings and create those feelings, when I am thinking about just loving him for who he is.

Rather than trying to love him for how well he performs this role for me. I also just want to be clear that nobody feels blissed out on love all the time and there's also nothing wrong with never feeling that way if you don't want to or that's just not of interest to you. Some of us don't really care about that. That's not what we're looking for in a relationship. But I kind of want to see, my default is not bliss. So I kind of want to see, can I get blissed out on love if I change my thinking even just for a little bit?

My partner's blissed out some of the time. It might be fun to join him and see what that's like. But I am only going to get there by focusing on loving him, not by focusing on loving how he performs some kind of role for me. So that's what I'm going to be working on. And if this podcast has resonated for you my chicken, I invite you to work on thinking this way too. And let me know how it goes. I'll see you guys next week.

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