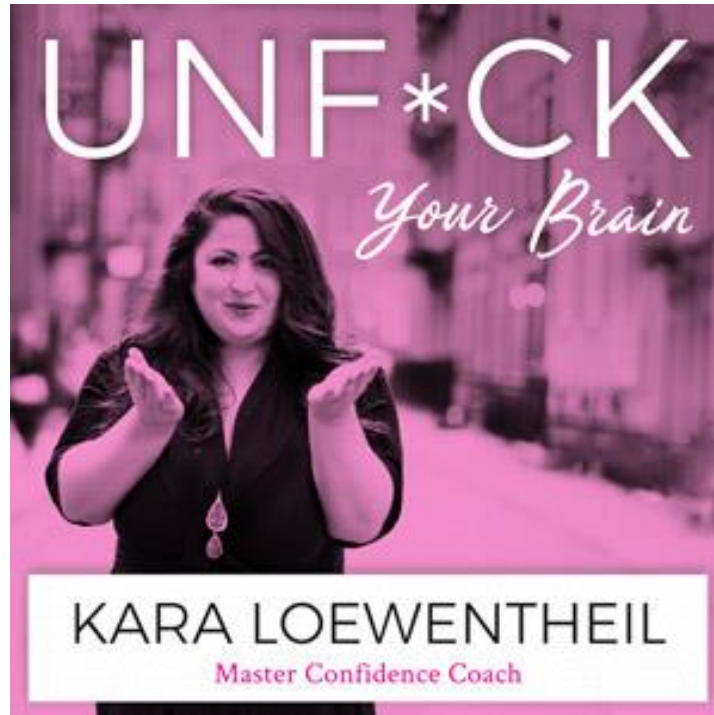


# UFYB 319: The Price Women Pay to Be Good: A Conversation with Elise Loehnen



## 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. This is one of those podcast interviews where my guest and I just riff for 20 minutes, cackling hysterically and then we're like, "We should have hit record, that would have been good for everybody to hear." Gone behind the scenes of all the nonsense of our joint ivy league education but that's not what we're here to discuss. So that could be a bonus follow-up podcast.

So I'm here with Elise Loehnen, who has an incredible book that I am sure you have seen around. And if you have not, you should go purchase it immediately, called *On Our Best Behavior: The Seven Deadly Sins and the Price Women Pay to be Good*. The minute I saw this title, I was like, "This is my people." Before I even realized that we had apparently been at Yale in the same college together a year apart and neither of us had any memory of this because we were extremely introverted. So welcome to the show. Tell us a little bit about who you are and what you do and then we will dive into the book.

Elise: I love it, a fellow Yale ghost. Although I think you probably had more of a presence. I was just hiding in the library stacks. So my name is Elise. I wrote this book *On Our Best behavior*, which I'm thrilled to say is a New York Times bestseller. And prior to that I've ghost written 12 books for other people, which is part of my own story, the unwillingness or fear that I've had to stand behind my own work. I am a long time media person. I grew up in magazines working at Condé Nast.

And before that I was a child in Montana, immersing myself in books and I would say studying culture from the outside in. And that's typically where I

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like to situate myself, diagnosing and watching and observing, rather than necessarily being in the center of it. Although I was in the center of it because I was the Chief Content Officer at Goop for seven years until about 2020, where I co-hosted the podcast and we did a Netflix show and started a lot of interesting conversations and then some.

And since 2020, I've been doing my own podcast, *Pulling the Thread*, writing this book. Just similar to you, trying to understand what our cultural programming that's so insidious, so invisible, so pervasive, how it is driving our lives.

Kara: So good. I want to get into the book. But I actually kind of want to talk about something you just brought up because I was thinking about this as I was going through the book and looking at your work, the sort of being an outsider. So one of the things that has always struck me, when I came into the coaching space and started looking at what people were teaching. I was kind of like, "Do they know there's a bunch of Christian ideas in this?" I don't think that they know because I am Jewish and was raised Jewish.

And so obviously I experienced social programming because I'm in our society, but I also was a little bit outside of it, in a way. I didn't get that same sexual purity programming at home. And when I came to coaching, I was like, "Okay, this idea, you're all teaching that everything is perfect because it happened that way", is a very culturally religiously specific idea. This is not just a truth about the world.

And I'm curious, what do you think, this is kind of just a personal question, but it's about our thinking. Do you think you just were sort of born thinking that way from the outside or was it something about how you were raised or your family or where you lived? What do you think kind of brought you to adopt that posture or find that comfortable?

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Elise: I think a big part of it is that I grew up in the woods literally. And my mom was not one to drive us to activities or set up playdates. So I spent so much time alone and in nature. And my mom is a massive reader. My brother's a book editor. And the only thing that they would sort of indulge us with was books. And I spent a huge amount of time at the library. I would take the bus from the school to the library and just immerse myself in the card catalog. So I think I was just reading really widely, very precociously, definitely things that I didn't fully understand.

And then within that sort of religious subtext, my mom is a recovering Catholic who is incredibly intolerant of any sort of organized religion, just extremely allergic to the point where it's calm down, mom. She just felt very wounded by the church. And then my dad is Jewish by way of South Africa. And his mother was from Poland. His father was from Germany. And they left their respective countries in the 30s. I'm not from Holocaust survivors which feels significant, I think in terms of sort of generational trauma and what we carry.

And we landed in Montana, small Jewish community but my dad's Judaism was never so remarkable to him or so marking that it became a huge part of my life. But we would go to services. We had a female rabbi from San Francisco who would fly in once a month maybe for the holiday.

Kara: [Crosstalk] in Montana? That makes more sense. She's flying in an abortion provider to [crosstalk] doctors.

Elise: Exactly. Yeah, but I never had a bat mitzvah. I knew on some level that I would be rejected by the faith because my mom had never converted etc. So I sort of dabble dabbled, but never felt completely claimed by that community. And then my parents were hippies, went to an alternative school with no grades, six kids a class. I ended up going to boarding school

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because there's a Montana connection, this Montana scholarship, which I did not win, but my brother did and then I ended up at Yale.

But I think it was just so used to being alone. And it's funny, my experience at Yale was not social particularly because I had no problem not fitting in. I wasn't in a secret society. I haven't been an anti-joiner. I just, it never has occurred to me to try to form my identity through exterior organizations. I don't actually, it's kind of the first time I've thought about this in some ways.

And I feel like Yale, I don't know if you had this experience, but when I got there, I think part of it is you get a bunch of kind of dorky kids together who maybe didn't have the best high school experiences. And then suddenly there's a massive amount of reinvention. And then it felt like there was so much flag waving, so much identity proclaiming like I'm a rugby player bisexual. Whatever it was, I don't know if you had that experience as well. I'm an alpha rower male and Pi Kappa Alpha Delta, whatever. And I didn't ever try to categorize myself. I don't know why.

Kara: What I'm gathering from this is the way to get your child into Yale is just let them read whatever, even if it's developmentally inappropriate. Because I also spent my entire childhood just reading with no regard for what I should be reading. That was my parents were also very, you got books for presents, that's what, yeah, you got a Hanukkah present, it's a book, congratulations.

So my father also, with me because I was the oldest, he still had a lot of hopes and dreams about what he could instill. So there was a whole reading program modeled on what Alexander the Great's tutors had taught him.

Elise: Perfect. Seems appropriate.

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Kara: Yeah, totally normal. Actually the weird thing about it is when you grow up and something doesn't seem weird to you. So my parents sent me to learn to read when I was three, which I'd always heard. And I just, when I wasn't around children, I didn't associate three with anything. And now I have a cousin who has a kid who's three and I'm like, "What?" That is extremely young. But I actually do think this is getting to a substantive point.

I've long thought that part of what has made me a good coach or just made me a non-judgmental person or made me a questioner, is all of that reading because I feel when you read, especially fiction, I don't know what you were reading. I read a lot of fiction. You're exposed to other people's thought processes and points of view. It's very hard to be, I think, a moral absolutist or a kind of even objective reality absolutist, if you read a lot, especially if you read a lot of fiction, because you're just seeing the different ways that people think.

And especially because I was reading everything from Jane Austen to now a lot has changed also. You have that exposure to how things change socially and just different subjectivities and interiorities.

Elise: Yes, that cannot be overstated how important that is. And to also understand, I'm thinking now of sort of in high school, I don't know, reading *The Fountainhead* and reading *Ayn Rand*, for example, and being like, "I love this."

Kara: I went through this phase too, looking back, I'm thinking, what is happening?

Elise: Yes, I think we all did. Yeah. I was so taken with it, so consumed by it. It's how you develop critical thinking, honestly. And part of it is to sort of understand how some ideas are so juicy and compelling and how deep you

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can go into it before you're like, "Wait, this is kind of not, there's something wrong there."

Kara: [Crosstalk].

Elisa: Yeah. But I think you only gain that durability for other people's ideas and the resilience and the willingness to engage with them when you expose yourself to a lot of different types of thinkers. And like you, I read almost exclusively fiction until 15/20 years ago when I now have been on a non-fiction tear.

Kara: So let's talk about the book because I think what this partly connects to, for me is the idea that one of the things I try to do on this podcast I think is so important. And a huge part of my perspective on my work is not just our cultural context now, but where did it come from and how has it changed. Because so much of challenging people's thought processes is pointing out that the things that we just take to be objectively true are not truths in other societies or at other times.

Even something that seems so unchallengeable as, I don't know, a pretty, a kind of intense example I often use is people say it's so unnatural for a child to die before their parents. That's such a culturally and temporally specific thing. For most of human history, that was in fact not unnatural. That was in fact the majority of the time when infant mortality was so high. That doesn't mean people obviously shouldn't grieve when something tragic happens.

But it's just even the things that we take to be just complete obvious statements about the world are so culture contingent. So in your book you write about the seven deadly sins. And I would love if you could talk to us about the origin of this concept because these sins are such a part of just

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culture, but they're really specifically Christian and from a specific time and place.

Elise: Yeah. One of the sort of questions I wanted to answer in taking on this book is exactly what you were saying. All of these parts of society that we take as inevitabilities or that's how it's always been, that's how it always will be. Even just sort of what in nature is a woman and what in nature is a man. Those are all fallacies. We'll never know because culture is so dominant. I write a brief history of patriarchy in this chapter, which as you can imagine, I read a vast amount of material to try to break this down and distill it, in part because I found myself saying sort of the patriarchy, it's, their, they, it.

I was like, what is it? What is it and where did it even come from? And is it Mitch McConnell? But to me it's a system that wasn't an inevitability. But it's so dominant in our psychology that it's hard to understand that it started somewhere and that it continues to sort of have us in its thrall. But it isn't being driven necessarily by any single person. It's also internalized in women, etc.

And what I wanted to also understand is, when did patriarchy become conflated or tied to morality? Because as we know from ancient [inaudible] like *Hammurabi's Code*, which is incredibly misogynistic. If a man commits adultery, he will pay his wife's father 50 bucks. If a woman commits adultery, she will be stoned to death and drowned.

Kara: I'm surprised it's not like we give him a prize. He gets a medal. He commits adultery, he gets a medal, she gets killed.

Elise: He gets a medal. He gets another partner. But there wasn't the same sort of morality. You don't see morality in a lot of those ancient patriarchal structures. So that's what I wanted to understand. And when did that



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become part of it, particularly in our Judeo-Christian patriarchy where goodness for a woman became the most important thing. And for men, power became the most important thing. Women are so vulnerable to any suggestion that we are bad, a bad mother, a bad person, a toxic coworker, ambitious, whatever.

It has all of its different characteristics but a character assassination through goodness for women is mortal. You just watch these women exit stage left, whereas men, they can do terrible things. They can be incarcerated, but as long as we perceive them as powerful, we will venerate them. So that's what I wanted to understand. Where did that come from?

And essentially, as I started to make these lists of what a good woman is. A good woman is hard working. She prioritizes other people's needs before her own wants. Does she even have wants? She probably doesn't have wants. She doesn't have desire. She doesn't have hunger. She doesn't really need praise, attention, affirmation and she definitely never gets upset.

Kara: No, she's like a circus robot. She's just a total automaton.

Elise: Yes, to quote Carol Gilligan, boys are taught to be in the world, whereas girls are taught to be of service to the world.

Kara: That's such a good quote. That's so good.

Elise: She has some amazing quotes. So they map to the seven deadly sins which are sloth, pride, envy, greed, gluttony, lust, anger. And there was actually an eighth, sadness, which I include in the book. And at first I was like, "That's crazy. I don't believe in these. I'm not consciously subscribed to any of these." I remember the movie. But as I started to sort

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of explore, I was like, “Oh my God, these are seated in us.” And they’re partially seated in us because, so they weren’t in the Bible, first of all. They don’t appear in the Bible as a set at any point.

They were first written down, I’m sure they were in circulation, but they were first written down by an Egyptian monk named Evagrius Ponticus in the fourth century at the same time that the New Testament was being canonized. And so some people probably know this. I didn’t really know this, but before the Council of Nicaea in the fourth century, there were all these gospels. Christianity wasn’t even, it was a persecuted sect. And let’s be clear, Jesus was a Jew, Mary Magdalene was a Jew. His apostles were Jews.

But there were many gospels in circulation and then they essentially, these monks, bishops, etc., as Rome became Christian, gathered and said, “These are the ones that we accept and these are orthodox. These are straight. And these are heretical. These are God and we destroy these.” And one of them was the Gospel of Mary Magdalene that they destroyed. Although we’ve recovered copies in recent decades and centuries. So I’m getting there, I promise, but Mary Magdalene.

Kara: No, I love all of this because all of this is how, I mean, I personally love it, but I just think also for listeners, how does received wisdom become received wisdom? How does who creates the orthodoxies, who decides what?

Elise: And it’s a game of telephone. There is no original source.

Kara: And there’s often literally a bunch of men sitting in a room being like, “Yes, no, yes, no.”

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Elise: And Jesus didn't write. He spoke, he said these aphorisms which were copied down in the centuries after he lived and died, copied by scrolls from, he spoke Aramaic. And then they were written down in Greek, etc. So this is a game of telephone, we'll never know. But there was this idea in the fourth century, these are the four books. These are the four gospels. This is what it is. And then those were edited over time to become more misogynistic, to become anti-Semitic, and here we are now.

So, Evagrius Ponticus writes down, there were originally eight demonic thoughts, but demon has a very different meaning. It means sort of distracting, not a devil. These are for other monks and Evagrius Ponticus, interestingly enough, is also credited as one of the early fathers of the enneagram. So these are sort of, he writes them.

Kara: He what?

Elise: Yes. And these are sort of these tendencies.

Kara: Enneagrams are from the fourth century. I need to back up, what is happening?

Elise: Enneagram is very cool and it has very old mystical roots and different, it goes back to Pythagoras. It's a whole thing.

Kara: We've got to have a whole other episode about that.

Elise: I have a person for you who you would love.

Kara: I have been understanding and misunderstanding the enneagram apparently.

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Elise: I have a Yale Law School grad who became a McKinsey consultant, got her master's, that essentially was on the board of Planned Parenthood and now she coaches the enneagram.

Kara: Wait, what is her name? How do I not know this person already?

Elise: Courtney Smith. I'm going to introduce you, because she's amazing.

Kara: I mean, I worked at Planned Parenthood.

Elise: Okay, yeah, she's amazing. Brilliant. Okay, so Evagrius Ponticus writes these down. They circle around. So in the New Testament, I'm going to talk briefly about Mary Magdalene because I'm a huge Mary Magdalene fan. And I don't care whether they were lovers, who cares? Probably, I'm sure I think Jesus had a fully human experience. But if you read her gospel and you read some of the other gnostic gospels, what is clear is that she was his best student. She is the one who understood it the most.

She was sort of his prized pupil. And this is in the New Testament as it is, as well as her gospel but she is the one to whom he resurrects. If you buy into any of this, she is with him in the tomb with his mother and Mary Salome. And then she comes back and sees him, mistakes him for a gardener, calls him Rabboni. He gives her his teaching. This is the Gospel of Mary. That's then deemed heretical and cast out.

So Mary's role in the New Testament is very minimized and she is mentioned only a few times as the one from whom Jesus cast seven demons. He exercised a lot of people, but as some theologians say, maybe he was balancing her chakras. Regardless, she's the most sanctified person in the Bible. But that's not as we know her. So in 590, Pope Gregory, the first, takes these eight thoughts, drops sadness, turns them into the cardinal vices. This is all on the same homily.

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Says, “These are the seven cardinal vices, the same vices that Christ or Jesus cast out of Mary Magdalene. She is the same woman as the woman who anoints Jesus’s feet with her hair and that woman is a prostitute.” And that’s where it started. And he also dispelled sort of the law against iconography. And so you start to see all this religious art depicting these vices as well as Mary as a penitent prostitute dressed in red, clinging and grabbing at Christ. And that’s where it started.

And so it wasn’t until very recently that one of the Popes said, “She wasn’t a prostitute. We kind of got that wrong.” And then Pope Francis made her the apostle to the apostles. But she was really the first apostle, not Peter. Our world would have looked very different, I think if she had been recognized and not turned into the carrier of all vice and a whore.

Kara: Not that there’s anything wrong with sex work if that’s what you’re doing, but obviously that wasn’t the framework in which people were.

Elise: Yeah. That’s not what I’m saying.

Kara: No. You’re saying that’s the people who were calling her a prostitute. They were not coming from a sex worker’s empowering framework.

Elise: No, this was not an empowering framework. You are correct.

Kara: Right. So I want to talk about the seven sins. But can we talk about sadness first? That’s so fascinating. Why was sadness considered a cardinal vice and tell us about your thoughts on that.

Elise: Well, it wasn’t. It was just one of these eight thoughts. And the way that Evagrius Ponticus writes about it is, he gives it a feminine soul. And so we don’t know why it didn’t make the list. I included in the book both because our culture is obviously soaked in grief. We are entering a time

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where we are more death averse, more unwilling to acknowledge we live and die. We all cycle. Women understand this I think more intimately. We cycle with the moon. We understand that we are part of nature.

We understand that our bodies are sort of a portal between the womb and the tomb. But I think there are a lot of men who are convinced that we can just up into the right our lives and deny this reality. You see this in longevity culture and hacking, it's very strange.

Kara: Yeah, all that biohacking, yeah.

Elise: And then I also think that going again to this idea of the way, because I wrote this book primarily about the lives of women and the feminine, I would say, which we all have our feminine and our masculine. But the way that so many boys, I wanted to answer a little bit of this question of what about the men. And I think that this aversion for sadness, this idea that it's weak, that you should not feel your feelings, that boys need to be clipped from their mother's apron strings.

That boys need to be turned into men, which is a very strange thing that we only say about boys, this is psychotherapist Terry Real.

Kara: Well, that's interesting. I don't think girls need to be turned into women, girls just become women.

Elise: Girls become women.

Kara: Boys are turned into men.

Elise: Yes, and this severing this wounding, he talks about how wounded boys become wounding men. And you look at culture and you look at depths of despair, suicidality, chaos unleashed. It's hard not to feel like

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men are in real trouble emotionally and psychologically. And that, yes, patriarchy theoretically is built for them by them. But if you subscribe to this idea, that patriarchy is a good or loving system, sure, I think we can all recognize it's not. It's built for power, dominance and control.

Kara: Right. It's not for their emotional and mental wellbeing. It's just for their kind of power and financial wellbeing. So interesting. You talk specifically about envy as the gateway to all sins, which I think is such an important concept. Because it really goes to the heart of women being so disconnected from what they want or what they think is possible for them. So can you talk a little bit about kind of your thoughts around envy. What does it mean that it's the gateway and how you write about it in the book?

Elise: Yeah. And I'm sure you see this all the time in your coaching.

Kara: All the time. What do you want? I have no idea.

Elise: I have no idea. And so, many years ago, five years ago, six years ago, I had this conversation with Lori Gottlieb, who wrote *Maybe You Should Talk to Someone*. and she has this small aside in her book where she says that she tells her clients to follow their envy because it shows them what they want. And this was a thought, as I read it, it's not a big moment, it just stuck in my mind for a number of reasons. One, because I had such a reaction to this idea of envy of no, never me. No, repress, deny, suppress, no way.

And that two, I was like, "I don't actually know what I want." And I couldn't answer that question for myself. And so in conversation with Lori, she was saying how our tendency is to, when we have envy and wanting and we recognize it in someone else, we'll deprecate them. And I was like, "Oh my God, that's it."

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And the way to understand both what you want and to identify and diagnose your envy is to start to pay attention to who it is that you have a tormented reaction to or a reaction to that's outside where you're saying things like, "I just don't like her. She rubs me the wrong way. I didn't think her, whatever it was, was really all that." It really comes down to why her, why not me?

Kara: Yeah. She doesn't deserve her success or she must be. Or what I see around in the business world a lot or the kind of coaching and entrepreneur world is, well, her success is either it's not real. She's lying about it. It's not really happening or well, she only gets that by, she must be cutting corners or being unethical or being whatever. There's all of these, we could have a whole fascinating conversation, I feel, about the sort of way that some of this social justice angle gets weaponized to sort of be anything we're envious of becomes unethical to us, there's a whole other thing.

But I think that this point about envy is so important because what the coaching part adds or the thought work part adds to this is that I think we do that because women are so socialized to believe that they're not supposed to want anything. And that they aren't good enough to get what they want anyway. So it can only metastasize into envy basically, because we're not able to just see it and use it as inspiration. We're so socialized so we're not able to see it and be like, "You can do that. I totally want to do that. That looks amazing."

Instead, it has to be, because we don't believe that we can and we're not socialized to think that we can do anything then it has to turn into envy and to the cutting down.

Elise: The cutting down and the dethroning. So the sins often crash into each other. So envy and pride are very closely related. Fear of inspiring



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envy is big for women as a reason to stay small because they know that they will be destroyed. And second, greed and this idea of scarcity, there's only room for one, maybe two, because she has it. Because her book is selling well or she has a successful podcast then I can't have it unless she goes away. And so I am going to destroy, dethrone her in order to make room for me, because it is deep in us.

Men do not operate like this. And we were talking a bit before we started about the podcast world. But the men are really good at networking each other, supporting each other, and they are taking over. They are taking over and you just don't see that same solidarity or 'sisterhood' amongst women because I think we're all convinced that we are in direct competition with each other. That if Kara's podcast tops the charts, mine is going to drag at the bottom. This is deep inside of us.

Kara: Yeah. And I feel it's so hard to talk about because it's one of these things that I think is full of gray areas, because there's also the stereotype that women are catty and bitchy and don't have each other's backs. And I don't think that's true in the sense that I have so many incredibly supportive colleagues and other women in my life, and I'm sure you do too. But I think the part about it that's not true is that for people who are our friends or in our in group or whatever, we can be very supportive of often.

But we still have that tendency of if it's somebody outside or if it seems too far away from me, I think is what happens. People have an easier time being supportive of people, it feels like are in their range, kind of. But then if somebody seems twice as successful or has a much bigger stage then you get back to that more objectifying envy, they're not a real person anymore.

Elise: And/or these are all the things they're doing wrong or let's pick apart their perfection or their goodness in order to put them back in their place. And I think that you made a really important point, which is this idea of

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women as Catty bitches and this is who we are. And this is where there's so much social patriarchal cultural programming that women are just gossipy, backstabbing bitches. It's no, this is not who we are. This is who we are cultured to be. And then this is a standard of behavior that talking shit about each other, that's just what women do.

No, actually it's not. It's just what we're taught. I write about in *Anger* the work of Carol Gilligan, who wrote *Odd Girl out*, which is such a good book about, again, formation of girlhood, morality, etc. And she writes about, and I think we can all recognize this, aggression is just part of being human. And boys are allowed to be overtly aggressive, to push and yell, fight, just whatever it is, girls are not. Girls don't do that. Girls don't push and they don't yell. And you see this modeled for us very, very, very early, very early.

And so all of that aggression becomes covert. That's when you get alliance building, whisper networks, backstabbing. It has to come out. It is part of who we are and yet we're not taught how to have conflict, how to be direct.

Kara: Yeah, we're taught that aggression is male and that women are not aggressive. And that if you are aggressive, that's unwomanly, deviant, unfeminine. There's something wrong with you. So it has to, we have to kind of disassociate ourselves from it and push in a different way.

Elise: 1,000% and all these bad feelings, I mean, the book is really about the psychology of women. Everything that we are, quote, is bad and are taught very young to repress and suppress and deny. We just end up projecting onto other people. We will make her this woman who's full of information, this woman who's pushing on our own dream. We will make her bad. We are going to just destroy her with all of the stuff that we can't alchemize. We don't know how to metabolize it and say, "This is great information." This is my soul saying do that, you want that, go for that.

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Kara: Yeah, it's so important. And I feel like there's such different, we can feel so, I think we trick ourselves sometimes into feeling very self-righteous about that. Especially when we sort of inflect it with true values that we may have, but that maybe are getting misapplied. I mean, I feel like I see this in the social justice online world a lot. There's a sort of, it can feel very good to be on the high horse. But I think that this question of if you feel, I mean if I were trying to translate this into practical concrete, how can you work with your thoughts on it.

Be looking out for either possibly a direct feeling of envy if you can recognize that, but if not, even looking for the places that you're like, "I don't like her. She rubs me the wrong way. I don't like the way she does that. I feel the desire to read the comments on this post and see if people are going after her. I want to say something snippy about her. I want to devalue what she's doing." It's not that it's morally bad of you, it's just how you've been socialized and programmed to think. But it's just where is that getting you?

What results are you producing in your own life, if that's how you're using up your mental energy? And that's not to say you can't have true value based objections to something. But that's why this practice of self-inquiry and using your own discernment is so important. Am I objecting because this person is truly acting in a way that doesn't align with my values? In which case, fine. Also, I don't have to consume everybody's stuff or buy from everybody or whatever. Or is this really, well, really I kind of want that person's life, but I don't believe that I can have it. And then why?

Why don't you believe you can't have it, whatever it is, the family, the business, the success, the creative pursuits, the whatever it is that that person has, what are the thoughts telling you that you can't have it that are forcing you to come out in envy instead?

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Elise: This is so big. It's so big. And you made a really important distinction. And part of the genesis for writing this book, besides wanting to understand patriarchy, was also living through the 2016 election and watching and knowing. I always was like, "Hillary won't win because women cannot get on side with other women." In part because I think for Hillary, particularly for women who are a little older than us, represented, how dare she? I would never allow myself to do the same.

And the way to distinguish, I think, because some people have said, "Well, I hate Lauren Boebert and I don't have envy of her." Well, you could, I'm sure say, "This is all the harmful behavior that Lauren Boebert is perpetrating." But I bet if you look at her, she doesn't actually really inspire any feeling in you, her actions do but that to me is the distinction. And so with someone like Hillary, when I would talk to people and I would encounter someone who would say, "Another woman, I just don't like her. There's something about her." To me that's envy.

Some people could say, "It's this policy. It's this. It's the Iraq war", whatever it is but they at least had evaluated her behavior.

Kara: Such an interesting distinction.

Elise: You don't have to like everyone. Not everyone is going to be your cup of tea but some people are full of information for you. It hits very different.

Kara: Yeah, I think that's interesting. I'm trying to think about is it an overlap case? Or I think there's also something where if somebody truly is just not your values or not for you, I'm not reading the Daily Caller website.

Elise: Or you just don't care. Yeah.

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Kara: It's not because I'm envious of it. But when you, I think when you have that sort of, there's something about it that feels personal to the person when you resent that person's success. I think you can also start to feel, for me that's often associated with feeling, usually when I think I'm feeling envious, I think I'm also feeling some shame. There's something wrong with me that I don't have that or I can't have that or I wouldn't be able to do it.

So I think that's also, when I think about what the fuck is wrong with Lauren Boebert, I do not feel any shame. I'm just like, "What the, that is." This is not my politics. I feel very clean. It feels very clean and just I object to this person on the...

Elise: And you probably don't think about her that much.

Kara: I don't think about her that much and if someone mentions her to me, I'm like, "Yeah, I object to her insane positions and the harm she's done." But I know I definitely have people that I have that envy about. For me, it'll be in the online business space, usually sort of people who have grown their business to a certain point. And yeah, it feels, it's much more muddled. It's not clear or clean at all. But I can feel that push pull.

So I think this is another example of the more that you pay attention to your own thoughts and feelings and you can kind of read that physical compass more clearly, you'll feel that it feels muddled and push pull. You want to look at them but you want to look away. But you kind of want to be like them but then you're like, "But why does she have to do that?"

You can sort of feel almost in a textural way the difference between how it feels when you have that kind of complex mixed motivation and how it feels when you're just like, "I just don't agree with this person on what they've done and I don't think they should be in charge."

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Elise: It's totally different, it has a totally different emotional weight. And the book is essentially all about that distinction of interrupting that voice in your head, which I think we've all thought is personal. I would say it's quite collective, that moralizing voice. For me it's the cattle prod that gets my butt off the couch after I've watched more than 15 minutes of Netflix that's like, you need to be doing something productive. Where I'm going to get my computer, going to load the dishwasher.

This breathless doing. It's the voice in my head that's like you ate a breakfast burrito. You're bad. Go walk. Whatever it is, we all have our own variation of the same, you're lazy.

Kara: I literally call it the voice in my book, that we have the voice that's inside our head that is constantly doing this, yeah.

Elise: Well, it's kind of the same voice, it is this voice that's not us, but it is so deep in us that it's hard to not hold it completely personally. But the more you can say, "Wait, stop, I'm going to let whatever this feeling of discomfort come up, I interrupt this programming." The better chance we have of getting it out of us.

Kara: Yeah, I always say that it would be great if the thoughts we learned came out in a male announcer voice. Because then it would be so much easier to know that they weren't us if the voice was like, "She's eating her breakfast burrito, folks. So now she's going to have to run a mile." But it was in mid-1960s news announcer voice.

Elise: It would be appropriate.

Kara: Yeah. So can you talk a little bit, we see the problem, we've talked about the kind of personal solution which I think also listeners of this

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podcast are familiar with this. Yeah, this will sound in the register they're used to of, we need to change the way that we're thinking.

Can you talk a little bit about how you think we need to rebuild and remodel society and social structures? Because you talk specifically about not doing that top down. Not having a corporate quota for the board members who are women or whatever. Can you talk a little bit about how you think about the solution on the structural kind of social scale?

Elise: Well, part of, and I recognize, I recognize all my privilege. And so this is entirely from my perspective as someone who has a good situation in this moment of space and time. And what I was also recognizing one of the impetuses for the book and partially it was this 2016 election but was looking at all the inequity and culture. And obviously it's incredibly complicated. So we're talking about gender. We're talking about class. We're talking about race, all of it.

And these things, Venn diagram as we know in our lives or not, and looking at this lack of equity, And then saying, "What the hell, there's something else happening here. It's not just, sure, I've encountered some malevolent men in my life, misogynists, sexual harassers." Sure. But this is so much deeper. I've also had incredible male mentors, friends. I'm married to a feminist guy. I am the mother of two boys. So this sort of binary men bad, women good. Let's sanitize patriarchy with femininity. That thinking also was driving me.

Kara: It's a wet wipe, we're just going to wipe this down.

Elise: It's a wet wipe. No, guys and women can behave in very toxically patriarchal, toxically masculine ways, and so.

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Kara: Or just toxically anything ways, I mean, white women have obviously contributed to racism and to systematic oppression along other lines.

Elise: Yeah, the women's KKK was huge, millions of members. I mean there's a lot in our history. And we know this and are contending with it hopefully. And I could recognize in me going back to envy, that there was some part of me that was holding back at moments from really getting behind other women.

And then one of the other myths that I just want to point out, and I write about this anthropologist, Ashley Montagu, who wrote this, I think it was for the New York Post and he has a book by the same name in the 50s, a piece called *The Natural Superiority of Women*. And essentially, he was like, "I'm stating facts here and women are more biologically durable. We live longer."

Kara: Biologically durable is an amazing phrase.

Elise: That might not be a direct quote, that might be my interpretation.

Kara: I'm going to go home to my partner is also 12 years older than me, "Listen, I'm just more biologically durable, I just want you to know that."

Elise: You're more biologically durable. You are, women are, we just are. We're built for longevity. We outlive men. And we've been outperforming men academically for a century. We outperform men and boys on intelligence, almost all variety. So all this is to say, it's not we need to overcome any sort of gap or chasm in our own intelligence or our own performance. And you can also say that even size and strength between men and women is a function of cultural breeding.



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When they look at Çatalhöyük in Anatolia, that's this prehistoric site. Men and women are essentially the same size. They were consuming the same calories. So men were not given better food, which often happens in some of these prehistoric sites. And they had an equal amount of smoke in their lungs. So we know culture is all over the place. We're creative and taking different formations, but if you look at Çatalhöyüks, there's evidence that so much of this male physical dominance has been bred into us as a desirable quality.

And the littleness, the daintiness of women is a cultural breeding program in many ways which is wild to think about taking all of these ideas and turning them on their head. So all to say that there is nothing inherently keeping us from equity. I recognize our legal system is not equal. I recognize that all of this is baked into our systems. But sort of similar to you, if I could start with myself, attend to all of this bad feeling about myself that I've never allowed to come up, let myself be more fully human.

Let myself experience my own desires and wants and ambitions. And let myself experience all the anger that I have stuffed into my body for 43 years. If I could do that and air it out, and if I could inspire other women to do it with me and sort of build conversation around this and we could get on side with each other. I think we could balance our culture quite rapidly without it being sort of this, let's just take what's existent and just fill it with women and it will invariably be a different world. I don't believe in that.

Kara: Yeah. I mean, I often use this example of why I think the mindset work that I teach is so important of saying, "Well, if we fill half the boardroom with women tomorrow, but they have the brains that they have now. All of the internalized structures are just going to start to repeat themselves." They're going to be apologizing for what they say in meetings, undermining their own contributions, taking on extra unpaid labor because somebody has to do it and the men aren't volunteering.

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It's going to just, the social structure will help replicate. That doesn't mean we still need the social and policy changes, but who comes up with those? Human brains, if we haven't liberated our own minds, we're not coming up with the best solutions.

Elise: And meanwhile I write a bit about the sort of qualities of the masculine and feminine, and this can get a little woo woo. But if you sort of take divine masculine as order, structure, truth. You take divine feminine as nurturance, care, creativity. And you say these energies, these are energies, they're not well named because they seem like they're attached to gender. I have a ton of masculine in me. I'm guessing you do, too. For me, it's my more exercised side, but it is essential regardless of gender. Gender doesn't really matter that we each are balanced between the two energies.

And that means for men, letting their feminine come up, letting all their nurturance, care, creativity, that is not the provenance of women solely. And these are essential human qualities. I love being in my masculine, I need to be sort of brought out of it at times. But this idea that these are just fixed to gender, I do think we're growing out of it. I think that that's sort of part of what this moment in time is about. But men need to learn how to lead and live differently as well or be allowed to. I don't think that they have well developed feminine sides.

Kara: Yeah, I mean, I tend more towards the queer theory deconstruction side of the spectrum of none of these things are feminine or masculine at all. And using those terms. I think it's hard to use those terms without all of the baggage but we definitely agree that all of...

Elise: They need new names. I don't know what, I don't know what those names are.

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Kara: Yeah. I think everybody should be allowed to have the full human spectrum. That is the whole problem is that men are only allowed to feel angry and women are supposed to feel helpless, sad or loving and those are the four emotions everybody's allowed to have and we're not able to fully embrace.

Elise: And our genitalia is maybe the least interesting thing about us, I think maybe many of us could agree.

Kara: Speak for yourself, Elise. Mine is extremely interesting. So where can people find the book and learn more about you?

Elise: Yours is the most fascinating.

Kara: Mine is, it went to Yale and Harvard. So listen, it's a very well informed vulva. Where can people find the book and learn more about you?

Elise: Okay, so, *On Our Best Behavior: The Seven Deadly Sins and the Price Women Pay to be Good*, available wherever you get your books. Ideally at an indie or library.

Kara: I always recommend bookshop.org. It's the indie centralized, but it's online.

Elise: Yes, bookshop.org, is wonderful. I write a substack [eliseloehnen.substack.com](http://eliseloehnen.substack.com). And I have a podcast called *Pulling the Thread*. And I'm on Instagram, just @lelisoehnen where I do a lot of etymology and other fun [crosstalk].

Kara: The things that people [crosstalk] fun, etymology.

Elise: It's a real party. It's a real party.

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Kara: Listen, I took an etymology course over the summer when I was in high school, so you cannot out etymology nerd me.

Elise: There is a book coming out about the formation or creation of the OED.

Kara: [Crosstalk]. Go get the book. Follow, Elise. Thank you so much for coming on.

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